

February

King Kalman (Colman), called "The Wise" was crowned on the 3rd of February, 1095. He was an enlightened man who modernized Hungary's laws. He forbade, among other things, the persecution of the *witches who, he stated, "did not exist"*. He signed this Law 700 years before Salem, at the height of the witch-hunting hysteria of the Middle Ages.

At the end of this 24-year reign he became prey to the intrigues of his family. His adulterous wife's evil behaviour may have given Kalman second thoughts about the "witches that did not exist..."

Miklos (Nicholas) Horthy, former Regent of Hungary, died on the 9th of February, 1957 in Portugal.

Horthy was a career officer in the Austro-Hungarian Navy and its last commander-in-chief. After the collapse of the dual Monarchy, he took part in the activities of the anti-communist national government-in-exile as commander of the so-called National Army.

After the collapse of the Bolshevik regime of Bela Kun (the so-called "Council Republic") in July 1919, Hungary was left without a government capable of enforcing law and order. During the following three months, individuals and vigilante groups committed certain violent acts of revenge against the people associated with the atrocities of the Bolshevik regime. The emigres of the Karolyi-Kun regimes denounced these lawless acts as "*The White Terror*" and accused Horthy and his regime of having permitted, or even committed them.

Horthy and his National Army were, during these months of chaotic interregnum under the strict supervision of the Allied (French) command in Southern Hungary. Therefore they had no opportunity to commit or to stop "atrocities". On the 10th of November, 1919, the Allies gave Horthy permission to enter Budapest and restore law and order in the country. Horthy then put *an end to these regrettable lawless acts* of revenge. The members of the Allied Control Commission in Budapest confirmed this unanimously.

The new Hungarian Parliament elected Horthy the country's Head of State with the title of "*Regent*" (*"Kormanyzo*) in 1920.

After his election he withdrew from active politics, becoming, in all but name a dignified constitutional monarch. He was scrupulously honest and he observed the Constitution meticulously, but his isolation and conservatism prevented him from recognizing the social problems of his nation.

During World War II his honest but rather old-fashioned and naive statesmanship was unable to prevent Hungary's involvement at the side of Germany. A warm-hearted humanist, he made his country a refuge for persecuted Jews and Poles during the war.

He was forced by Germany to *resign in October, 1944*. Subsequently, he was interned in Germany and freed at the end of the war by the Americans. He then settled in Portugal and lived there until his death.

In spite of his conservatism, Horthy initiated an interesting *social evolution*: he had himself

surrounded by middle-class personalities, creating a “new nobility” with honours and titles somewhat similar to the British system. He thus intended to create a new ruling class to replace the old aristocracy. Of his 14 Prime Ministers only one was a landed aristocrat. The world of his old-fashioned values collapsed in 1945 with Hungary’s defeat and Soviet occupation.



THE PAINTER OF COMPASSIONATE REALISM

Mihaly Munkacsy, the greatest Hungarian painter, was born on the 10th of February, 1844.



Orphaned, he was placed in a joinery as an apprentice. His painting talent was discovered and his relatives sent him to Vienna to study art. He managed to finance his studies by the sale of his paintings in Austria and Germany. His Magyar landscapes, inspired by his childhood memories, attracted considerable attention.

In 1870 he painted the *“Condemned Cell”*; a homage to a childhood idol, a Robin Hood of the Magyar puszta, the *“betyar”*. The painting gained the coveted Gold Medal of the Paris Salon. His success lured the young painter to Paris where he was welcomed by the critics and patrons of the arts. The fine genre compositions of this period present examples of his dramatic and compassionate approach to the poor and old, such as *“Woman carrying faggots”* and *“Vagabonds of the night”*.

He married a wealthy French baroness, but his marriage was childless and unhappy. Though successful, Munkacsy still felt an exile, a lonely man who received no real love from his snobbish wife or selfish friends, a stranger in an alien paradise. His tragic mood is best represented in the masterpiece *“Milton”*, where he painted the tragic, blind English genius, exiled and hated by his own family.

At the height of his career he turned to religious themes. In *“Christ before Pilate”* he expressed the contrast of Christ’s dignified silence amid a shouting, hostile crowd. After having tried many models for Christ, Munkacsy finally painted his own tormented, sad face. Three years later he completed *“Golgotha”*, capturing the awesome moment following Christ’s death on the cross. The amazing range of colours

includes several shades of white. He was a true magician with colours: once, in a gesture of bravado, he painted a woman's portrait using 572 shades of blue.

Tortured by an old illness and certain of his approaching death, he worked feverishly. He painted portraits of famous men, completed a large mural in Vienna and then the mural "*Conquest of Hungary*" for the new parliament of his country. His last work was "*Ecce Homo*": Pilate showing the scourged Christ to the Jews. He painted it while mortally ill - concluding his Christ trilogy and his own life's work. He died in 1900.

Munkacsy, the most popular painter of his time in Paris is hardly known abroad today. His unpronounceable name and the fact that he insisted on remaining an alien in France have made the emotional French forget him quickly. He did not belong to any school or group either. Most of his masterpieces were bought up by rich Americans and thus disappeared from public view. His own countrymen also failed to appreciate his delicate colours, fine distinctions of shades and compassionate themes.

His original style - we may call it "compassionate realism" shows a deep insight into the sufferings of the human soul, especially of the poor and old, his favourite models. This was not a popular choice in the complacent era of Victorian snobbery. His portraits and compositions are exquisite studies in human psychology: he always grasps the moment of eloquent silence: the principal character has just said something or is about to say something, whilst the secondary characters provide a disturbing background of sounds.

Since his death his fame and glory have faded and so have the delicate colours of his few masterpieces still visible in the galleries of his two countries, France and Hungary.

On the 11th of February, 1676, 26 Hungarian galley slaves were released by the Spanish Navy.

Leopold 1 (1640-1705), a bigoted tyrant, was endeavouring to turn the Hungarians of his Empire into Catholic-Germans. The Hungarians, many of whom had turned to Protestantism in protest against the Catholic Habsburgs, refused to renounce their religion or their nationality. Leopold had their preachers brought before an Inquisition-like court, which sentenced about 90 of them to death. "Kind-hearted" Leopold reprieved them and changed their sentence to perpetual galley-slavery. Then he *sold the preachers to the Spanish...*

The Protestant nations of the West were appalled by Leopold's cruelty and protested vehemently {especially Holland}.

The emperor then allowed the Dutch admiral Ruyter to release the prisoners from the Spanish. By that time only 26 preachers were alive.

Ilona Zrinyi, the mother of Prince Ferenc Rakoczi, died in exile **on the 18th of February, 1703.**

She was the daughter of Peter Zrinyi, the patriot executed by the Vienna regime for plotting against the Habsburg King of Hungary. Her uncle, Miklos Zrinyi, was the greatest Hungarian statesman and

soldier of the century. Ilona inherited her father's fiery patriotism and her uncle's statesmanship and military qualities.

Her first husband was the Transylvanian prince, *Ferenc Rakoczi I*. They had two children: Ferenc who later became the leader of Hungary's greatest freedom struggle, and a girl, Julia. After the death of her first husband, Ilona married *Prince Imre Thokoly*, the leader of the Hungarian freedom struggles at the end of the 17th century. Thokoly who fought the Germans as an ally of the Turks had to flee to Turkey when the German imperial troops chased the Turks out of Hungary.

Ilona Zrinyi remained, with her two children in the family fortress-castle *Munkacs*, in Hungary. She defended the fort successfully for *three years* against superior imperial forces. At the end of the longest siege in Hungarian history, she surrendered the fort, accepting the German commander's guarantee of safe conduct.

In breach of the guarantee, Ilona Zrinyi and her two children were taken to Vienna and prison. Thokoly eventually managed to redeem his wife, but the two children were kept in Vienna as wards - practically prisoners - of the Emperor. *Ilona rejoined her husband in exile in Turkey*. She died there in 1703 - the very year, her son, Ferenc began his epic war of freedom in Hungary.

Ilona Zrinyi was the finest example of patriotic Magyar womanhood. Together with the virtues of the loyal wife and loving mother, she also possessed the talents for military leadership and wise statesmanship - attributes which made many Hungarian ladies of those turbulent times worthy and equal companions of their warrior husbands.

Her remains, together with those of her son and husband, were brought back to Hungary in 1906 and laid to rest in the old Hungarian town of *Kassa*. Ironically, her last resting place has once again become a place of exile as the historic Magyar town has been awarded to Czechoslovakia by the Trianon treaty...

Jozsef Szigeti, the great violin virtuoso died on the 19th of February, 1973.

He was born in Hungary and educated in Budapest. Among his professors were such masters as Joachim and Hubay. Szigeti's style was distinctive for the purity of the tone and his unpretentious, classic honesty. He was also a great teacher and a master of the art of transcription. Among his transcriptions were the piano pieces of his friend, Bartok.

Szigeti was only one of a galaxy of great Hungarian performing artists, such as the violinists *Ede Remenyi*, *Emil Telmányi*, *Joseph Joachim*, *Jeno Hubay*, *Johanna Daranyi*, *Ferenc Vecsey*, the cellist *Janos Starker* and pianists, like *Geza Anda*, the performer of the famous Mozart theme for the film "Elvira Madigan."

THE GREATEST TELLER OF TALES

The romantic novelist **Mor (Maurice) Jokai** was born on the **19th of February, 1825**.

He is still one of the most widely read authors in Hungary. His work is also well-known abroad in many translations. In 56 years of literary activity, Jokai has had over one hundred volumes of short stories and novels published,

His first historical novels were written during the Austrian oppression of Hungary, following the defeat of the 1848 Freedom War. Some of these novels describe imaginary events in Hungary during the Turkish wars (16th - 17th centuries). He ignores the historic truth and changes the Turks and Hungarians into heroes and villains. He paints a fantasy world of historic "westerns", in which the main concern of "Goodies" and "Baddies" is personal pride and honour rather than the nation's plight. Later he turned to more recent history and wrote closer to historic truth. The novel "*The Baron's Sons*" is a fine epic of the Freedom War, with a pleasant blend of history and romance.

One of his many social novels, "*Dark Diamonds*", suggests an easy solution to the social problems of the workers of a mine. They are redeemed by the joint efforts of the patriotic scientist-hero (the owner of the mine) and the beautiful and brilliant daughter of the miners' leader. The two transform the mining village into a Utopian community where everybody lives happily ever after - including the hero and the heroine. A commendable solution to labour-management disputes.

The hundreds of short stories and novelettes, the favourite intellectual diet of the Sunday papers, offer relaxing, uncomplicated entertainment without cumbersome philosophies.

Jokai's topics include the complete range of human experience (and a few inhuman ones), all possible periods of history (and a few impossible ones), all known regions of the world (and a few known to Jokai only), but only two basic emotions: love and hate. He describes history not as it was but as it should have been, human relationships as they might have been and science as it could have been. He has tales to tell - and he tells them with humour and a twinkle in his eye. Some call him the "greatest Hungarian teller of tales". In a nation in which every second man is a politician, this is praise indeed.

To illustrate Jokai's romantic style, here are the concluding lines of the novel "*Dark Diamonds*" mentioned above. The coalmine is saved (hence the title "dark diamonds") and the owner-hero had just asked the miner's daughter to marry him: "*-Oh, sir' she whispered, if I do not die, I shall always love you; but I feel that I shall die.*

As she spoke she fell back in a faint. Her brilliant colour faded to a wax pallor, her flashing eyes closed; and her body, which a moment before was like a blooming rose, crumpled lifeless, like an autumn leaf.

Ivan held her lifeless body in his arms.

The woman whom he had loved for so long, for whom he had suffered so much, was his, just as her pulse ceased to beat, just as she said: 'I shall always love you, but I feel that I shall die.'

But she did not die.

A diamond is a diamond for ever."

The 24th of February is the anniversary of one of the darkest episodes of Hungarian history, the

death of Charles Durazzo, king of Hungary In 1386.

After the death of Louis the Great in 1382, king of Hungary and Poland, the two countries accepted his two daughters as their queens respectively. However, the nobles of Croatia - which was forming a union with Hungary - refused to accept Louis' daughter, Mary as their queen. They persuaded instead *Charles Durazzo*, a distant relative of the late king, to claim the Hungarian throne.

Charles invaded Hungary at the head of a Croatian-Italian army and intimidated Queen Mary to accept him as "King-Consort". He was crowned by an equally intimidated archbishop. The Hungarian nobility refused to accept him, and; decided to remove "the usurper" from the throne. A few weeks after the coronation, a deputation led by the Palatin (First Minister), appeared before Charles. One of the members of the deputation, *Count Fprgach* drew his sword and attacked Charles. Charles and his Italian courtiers defended themselves, but Forgach inflicted mortal wounds on Charles. He died a few days later, after a reign of only 60 days.

Though assassination of kings was common practice in Europe in those centuries, Hungary had been unaffected by this popular fashion until that time. The death of the only king ever killed by his subjects in Hungary can be explained, but not excused.

At the end of the month of February the Church celebrates the memory of two of Hungary's 40 saints.

The Blessed Laszlo Batori is remembered on the 27th of February. He was a distant relative of King Matthias, a Pauline monk, remembered as the first translator of the Bible. He died around 1484.

Better known is the Blessed **Hedwig of Hungary**, also known as *Queen Jadwiga of Poland* whom the Catholic Church remembers on the 28th of February.

She was the younger daughter of King Louis of Hungary and Poland. After her father's death in 1382 *she inherited the throne of Poland*. Hedwig or Jadwiga, as the Poles called her - was crowned at the age of 12. She was already engaged to a German prince with whom she was in love. However, she renounced her love for the sake of her Polish nation: she married the pagan prince of the neighbouring Lithuanians, Jagiello, in order to pacify the warlike neighbours of Poland. She united the two nations and Jagiello and his people were soon converted to Christianity under the influence of the saintly queen.

Jadwiga ruled her Polish-Lithuanian people with dedication and wisdom. She visited all regions of the united countries, dispensed justice in person, preached the gospel and established schools, hospitals and monasteries The Poles called her "Little Mother" and revered her as a saint even during her lifetime.

She died at the age of 26 - after giving birth to her only child.

The painter Count Mihaly Zichy died in Russia on the 28th of **February, 1906**,

He left Hungary after the defeat of the Freedom War in 1849 and lived in France and Russia working

as a successful graphic artist and painter. His best known works are the romantic graphic illustrations for Hungarian, French and Russian poetry.

He kept his proud Hungarian identity during 50 years of exile. In his memoirs he explained:
"Whoever was lucky to be born a Hungarian will always remain a Hungarian."