

March

THE MAGNIFICENT TWILIGHT OF MEDIEVAL HUNGARY

King Lajos I (Louis) called the "Great" was born in Hungary on the 5th of March, 1326.

He was the son of Hungary's *King Charles- Robert*, himself a descendant of the Arpads on his mother's side and a scion of the Neapolitan Anjou House. Prince Lajos was educated at the courts of Buda and Visegrad. He received the best of Hungarian and Western ideas of Christian chivalry and late-Gothic culture. *In 1342 Lajos inherited the throne* of a strong and prosperous Hungary. He was called the last of the knight-kings, a truly Christian monarch, like his ideal, Saint Laszlo, the 11th century Hungarian king.

Lajos was a great patron of *art and science*. He founded the first Hungarian university at Pecs in 1367. The pre-Renaissance statues, made during his reign and recently found in Buda show a remarkable degree of artistic taste and workmanship in an era when sculpture was still little more than an ornamental extension of architecture.

He saw the danger of the Turkish advance on the Balkan Peninsula and created a protective belt of vassal states under Hungarian rule across the peninsula. In Dalmatia - similarly a Hungarian province - he established a naval base against Venice, an ally of the Turks. Such was his fame in Europe, that the Poles *invited him to their throne in 1370*, which he accepted. During the period of personal union, Poland and Hungary formed a giant zone of peace and prosperity in the centre of war-torn Europe.

Ironically, he had little success in dealing with the country of his ancestors, *Naples*. His brother, Endre had inherited the Neapolitan throne but he fell victim to the intrigues of his wife and courtiers and was assassinated; Lajos reluctantly led two campaigns into Italy to punish the criminals, but achieved only partial success. *He died in 1382*, after a long illness, probably leprosy, contracted during his campaigns.

In the century which saw the stormy twilight of the Middle Ages, the beginning of the Hundred Years War, the internal wars of western Europe, the ravages of revolutions, uprisings and the "Black Death", the Hungary of Lajos the Great was the island of peace and prosperity in the heart of Europe.

The painter Laszlo Paal died in France on the 4th of March, 1879, at the age of 33. He was a friend of the Hungarian painter Munkacsy. Like many of his talented compatriots, Paal left the oppressive atmosphere of Austrian-dominated Hungary after the freedom struggle of 1848. He lived and worked abroad: in Holland, then in France where he became a member of the so-called school of Barbizon. His

soft, melancholic landscapes reflected the profound pessimism of the talented but unhappy and lonely artist.

On the 5th of March, 1888 the Hungarian explorer, count Samuel Teleki discovered two huge lakes in Central Africa. He named them, after the Hungarian Crown Prince and his wife, Lake Rudolf and Lake Stefania respectively. The modest scientist did not name any geographical features after himself. The well-known Mount. (or Volcano) Teleki was named after him by an English explorer.

We find Hungarian names on the map of other continents too. There is a Zsigmondy Peak in the Alps and a Zichy Island in the Arctic. Central Asia honours the memory of three Magyar explorers with names such as the Cholnoky Peak, Loczy (Lhotse) Peak and Nopcsa Peak. This last one is dedicated to the memory of Ferenc Nopcsa, an adventurous explorer of the turn of the century to whom the Albanians once offered the throne of their newly created country. Nopcsa declined - and continued his search for dinosaurs.

The town of Esterhazy in Canada and the towns of New Buda and Kossuth in the United States received their nostalgic names from their Magyar founders at the end of the 19th century.

The 12th of March, 1241 marked the beginning of the worst tragedy of medieval Hungary: the so-called Tartar or Mongol invasion. On that day the immense army of Batu Khan broke through the Verecke pass of the Carpathians.

Batu, the grandson of Jengis (Ghengis) Khan set out in 1239 from Asia to conquer Europe, especially Hungary. His well-trained swift and brilliantly led horsemen overran in quick succession Armenia, the Russian and other eastern-European principalities. He then defeated the Poles thus securing his right flank, then turned against his principal enemy, Hungary, the only remaining bulwark of western Europe. Having broken through the Carpathians, the Mongol horsemen soon reached the heart of Hungary, destroying the towns and killing every living soul wherever they met with resistance. The Hungarian king, *Bela IV*, attacked the Mongols who enticed his army into the treacherous swampy terrain of the Sajo River at *Mohi*. The battle of Mohi is remembered on its anniversary, the 12th of April.

On the 12th of March, 1879, the flood of the Tisza River destroyed Hungary's second largest city, Szeged. The disaster elicited an international response: many of the world's great cities contributed to the reconstruction of the stricken city. This relief action was mainly initiated by the Hungarian refugees abroad who, after the defeat of the freedom war of 1848, created an atmosphere of understanding and sympathy for Hungary all over the world. In grateful memory, the finest streets of modern Szeged bear the names of the assisting cities.

The first Russian Revolution broke out on the 14th of March, 1917. Alexander Kerenski, the leader of

a small left-wing party, Soon became the central figure in the events, which resulted in the overthrow of the Russian dynasty. This was followed by general chaos and confusion. Lenin's well-prepared Bolsheviks, who had been waiting in Switzerland, then took over in November 1917. They swept Kerenski and his confused Liberals out of office, and began the bolshevization of Russia.



The effect of these events reached Hungary a year after Kerenski's fall. In *October 1918 Michael Karolyi* copied carefully all of Kerenski's mistakes, overthrew the old regime, created a Republic and plunged the country into complete chaos and misery. Then, realizing his failure, he handed the government of the country to Bela Kun and his team of Russian-trained Bolshevik agents. This was on March 20, 1919, the tragic March day which marks the beginning of the so-called "Dictatorship of the Proletariat" or "Council Republic", which completed the destruction of historic Hungary.

THE HUNGARIAN SPRING OF 1848

March, the first month of the northern spring, has always been a period of violent change in Europe. On the 15th of March the Hungarians, too, celebrate the anniversary of such a spring revolution, but a peaceful, bloodless one.

In 1848 Hungary was little more than a province of the Austrian Empire, ruled by the Habsburg emperor, who was also king of Hungary. In order to regain the freedom of the Hungarian nation, the Magyar political leaders began negotiations in Vienna with the imperial government. They demanded the establishment of a constitutional government in Hungary and the status of an equal partner in the dual Monarchy.

Dissatisfied with the slow progress of these negotiations, the youth of Pest, the Hungarian capital, decided to demand action. On the 15th of March, 1848, the poet Petöfi recited his stirring poem "Arise Magyars", to the assembled demonstrators. The crowd then moved in a disciplined procession to the office of the imperial Governor and presented their demands - *the famous 12 points*.



These were printed for the first time without censorship. The points were almost word by word

identical with the demands being negotiated in Vienna. They demanded, among other things, the abolition of serfdom, equality for all before the law, freedom of religion and of the press, and free elections by popular vote,

The military watched the demonstrations with sympathy - *not a shot was fired*. In the meantime, word reached the capital that the Vienna negotiations had ended successfully and that a democratic government had been granted by the emperor. Thus the youth of the capital expressed, without bloodshed, the nation's unanimous decisions to introduce sweeping reforms - an achievement which had cost the French nation hundreds of thousands of lives just half a century before.

March the 15th with its symbolic gesture has since remained the *Hungarians' great national day*, the one day of the year when Hungarians all over the world forget their differences and discover what unites them: their love of freedom.

March the 17th is the anniversary of the death of Tivadar Puskas, scientist and friend of Edison. He invented the tele-phonograph, a predecessor of radio broadcasting, and developed the principle of telephone exchange. A year after the invention of the telephone he set up the world's first telephone exchange in Paris. He died in 1893.

Cardinal archbishop Peter Pazmany died on the 19th of March, 1037.

Born of a Protestant family, then converted to Catholicism, he joined the Jesuit order and eventually became Primate of Hungary.

By the end of the 10th century most Hungarian nobles had adopted the Protestant faith in protest against the Catholic Austrian Habsburg regime, which had treated Hungary little better than the pagan Turks. Pazmany convinced his fellow-Hungarians that Catholicism was not identical with Austrian Habsburg oppression, and that religious discussions did not have to degenerate into bloody battles as in Germany, France or England. His only weapons were the written and spoken word. He was a true Magyar patriot, and he approved of the independent policies of the Protestant princes of Transylvania. He realised that the small, mountainous principality was the Magyar nation's last bastion against the Turks and the Germans. He carried on a friendly correspondence with the Protestant rulers of Transylvania.

The result of their common effort was that Hungary was spared the horrors of the religious wars of that century.

Pazmany was an accomplished master of the colourful Hungarian word, which he used with quick wit and deep logic. The following extract from one of his writings may serve as a useful memento in the atomic hysteria of our days:

"Men build slowly, but they are quick to destroy their beautiful buildings. Not so almighty God. For He builds quickly. In six days He created Heaven and Earth in all their fairness and splendour, but he took seven days to destroy a single city, Jericho. Nor will He hasten to bring this world to dust and ashes. He waits with great patience, as He does now. ."

On the 19th of March, 1944 Hitler's Germany *suppressed Hungary's independence*.

The German's intervention was a reaction to the Hungarian endeavours to extricate themselves from the War. By 1943 Hungary found herself committed in the war against Soviet Russia. The Regent, Miklos Horthy, instructed the Prime Minister, Miklos Kallay, to seek an armistice from the Allies. As Hungary was surrounded by German occupied countries or Germany's satellites, the negotiations were conducted in secret. Besides, Hungary was harbouring a million Jews and other refugees from German persecution. A sudden German intervention would have endangered their lives.

Hungarians are not very good at keeping secrets, and so Hitler soon learned of the negotiations and invited Horthy to Germany in March 1944. Here he faced the Regent with an ultimatum. This was that, unless he appointed a government committed to Germany, Hitler would order satellite troops in to occupy Hungary. During the "talks", on *the 19th of March*, German troops and the Gestapo occupied the key positions in Hungary. Horthy had no choice: he did not want to resign. That is to say, he did not want to leave his sinking ship.

He knew that Hungary had no troops at home to resist the Germans. So he appointed a government designated by Hitler. From this day until the end of the war, the German army and the SS kept Hungary under occupation. The country's administration was placed under German police and military supervision.

Thus the leadership of Hungary was deprived of its freedom of action during the critical last months of the war.

The 20th of March is the feast of a little-known Hungarian saint, the Blessed Mate Csak, who died a Dominican monk in 1336.

He was the nephew of the better-known Hungarian lord of the same name who ruled practically all of Upper Hungary in the 14th century as a semi-independent feudal prince. *Lord Csak*, Palatin (First Minister) of Hungary in his time and a direct descendant of the 10th century Magyar-chieftain Elod, would be amused to learn that certain imaginative Czech historians have used his name to prove their claims to Northern Hungary. In a submission to the Peace Treaty Commission, these "historians" pointed out that the word "Czech" in its modern English pronunciation is somewhat similar to the Hungarian pronunciation of "Csak". This proves that Lord Csak was Czech, and consequently the area ruled by him must be Czech national territory.

This poor linguistic joke about 14th century Czechs speaking 20th century English was accepted by the Commission as one of the "proofs" deciding the fate of Hungary at Trianon in 1920...

THE IDOL OF A NATION

Lajos Kossuth died on the 20th of March, 1894 at the age of 92 exiled in Italy.

Descendant of an old Hungarian family, he was a lawyer by profession and possessed exceptional talents as an orator, writer and statesman. Elected to the Hungarian Diet (Parliament) he joined the reform movement led by Count Szechenyi. During the subsequent sessions of the Diet a difference in

priorities began to separate Kossuth's "Liberals" from Szechenyi's "Moderates": Kossuth's primary goal was to obtain the nation's political freedom, whilst Szechenyi suggested internal social and economic reforms first.



When a responsible government was granted to Hungary in March 1848, Kossuth was a member of the first Ministry. During the summer of 1848, the Austrian government began destroying Hungary's new freedom by rousing the nationalities against the Hungarian government and later by active use of imperial troops against the Hungarian National Army. Kossuth became the nation's leader during the freedom struggle. In April 1849 he was unanimously *elected Head of State with the title of Regent*, to replace the dethroned Habsburg emperor. But the intervention of the Russian Army in May 1849 decided the fate of Hungary: the fight for freedom was lost.

After the capitulation in August 1849 Kossuth *sought refuge abroad*. After a short stay in Turkey, he was invited to the *United States*.

The American government also invited him to address sessions of the Congress and the Senate: an honour only granted to one other foreign politician; Winston Churchill. During his stay in the U.S. and then in England he made the plight of his nation known to the western world in several hundred addresses delivered in fluent, colourful English.

After his return from the U.S., Kossuth lived in England, *and later in Italy*, watching the European political scene and hoping that an opportunity would arise to initiate another campaign for the liberation of his nation. During these years he managed to gain world-wide attention and sympathy for his nation's cause through his speeches, writings, correspondence and negotiations. Thus the constant pressure of public opinion maintained by Kossuth's activities remained a real threat to Francis Joseph's shaky empire, and became a deciding factor in hastening the Austrian acceptance of the so-called "*Compromise*". This agreement, concluded between the two nations in 1867, made Hungary a (nominally) equal partner in the so-called "Austrian-Hungarian Monarchy".

Kossuth refused to approve of the "Compromise". He believed that Hungary, tied to doomed Austria, would eventually fall with the Habsburg Empire. His prophecy became tragically true at the end of World War I.

He remained in exile in Italy. In his writings he advocated the creation of a *confederation of Central European Nations* in order to secure their independence between the two aggressive powers, Russia and Germany. The suggestions of this great old statesman are remembered today as the only solution that could have prevented the horrors of, two world wars.

He died in Torino, Italy. Only then was he allowed to return to Hungary. His remains were brought to Budapest. Hundreds of thousands of Magyars wept as his body was laid to rest in the soil of his native country.

His name - probably the best known Hungarian name in the world - has since remained synonymous with the Magyars' love of freedom.,

March the 28th is the day of Saint **John Capistrano**. This Italian monk joined the Hungarian crusaders of John Hunyadi and inspired them with his fiery speeches. With, his help, .the great Hungarian general defeated the Turkish armies in various battles during the 15th century.

Saint John died of the plague together with his friend, John Hunyadi a few days after their greatest victory at Nandorfehervar in 1456. He was one of the many foreigners who, attracted by the strange magic of Hungary, came to join the Hungarians and die for them.

Dezso Kosztolanyi was born on the **29th of March, 1885**.

On completing his studies at the Faculty of Philosophy in Budapest, he joined the circle of writers

inspired by western literary trends. He became an outstanding poet, essayist and prose writer, the greatest impressionist in Hungarian literature. In all his writings his principal consideration was the purity of the Magyar language. His prose shows a sympathetic observer of human frailty while his poetry often hides deep philosophy under the deceptively simple exterior, as in the following lines from a poem written to his 'wife:

*You came in my room telling something odd;
so after years of years I realized
that there you are and scarcely listening
surprised I looked at you. I closed my eyes.
And this to myself I repeated mumbling:
"I am used to her as I am used to air.
She is giving me the breath"*

(Tr. by E. E. Kunz)