

## HUNGARY AFTER TRIANON

**I**F there is one thing which, above all others, impresses the mind of the casual traveller through post-war Hungary, it is the amazing resistance to an adverse fate which the people of this Central European country are presenting. Rhapsody—the word most frequently thought of in connection with Hungary—according to my dictionary means: an enthusiastic, high-flown utterance or composition. Well, in so far as its application to post-war Hungary is concerned, this word means something totally different. Hungary's greatest rhapsody, something infinitely finer than Liszt ever dreamed of, is the slow, firm, unwearying heroism with which she is meeting the trials of Trianon.

Before attempting to show what an amazingly plucky fight Hungary has made since the war, it is necessary that I sketch very briefly the condition of the country before that upheaval.

A thousand years ago the Magyars crossed the Carpathians and settled in the fertile lands to the west; and, from the time of King and Saint Stephen in the eleventh century, when the nation embraced the Catholic faith, to the commencement of the last war, these people have gone on and on, steadily building up a national culture and a national feeling second to none throughout the world. As early as the fifteenth century, under the rule of Matthyas the Magnificent, Hungary was known as the most brilliant renaissance kingdom in Europe. By the fourteenth year of the present century the country had achieved a civilisation which could not but deeply impress all who came within its influence. Then came the crash, and, as a result of the treaty at the end of the war, the territory of the

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nation was reduced by approximately two thirds, and the population from twenty millions to eight millions.

That reduction of population was the worst blow, for it meant that about twenty millions of Hungarians were suddenly cut off from their own land. Czecho-Slovakia, Roumania, Jugoslavia, even Austria, Hungary's ally in the war, were given limbs from off the body of former Hungary; and with these limbs they were presented with the life blood of the country in the shape of millions of Hungarian subjects. Ladislaus Bródy, a Hungarian poet, has the feeling of these exiles in a poem, 'Expatriation,' the last verse of which runs somewhat thus :

Yes, hold ajar the gates of Magyarland,  
Give me a knotty staff—and then when I  
Once more shall have the starlit heavens scanned :  
Silently though, but bravely say, ' Good-bye !'  
I never shall look back when once I'm out  
Of Magyarland, but all at once I'll stand  
Erect, and with a knife, strong, sharp, and stout,  
I'll cut my own heart out with my own hand,  
Because this heart of mine is Magyar still !

Such words as these of Bródy's show more plainly than anything I may say the intensity of feeling in the hearts of the exiles. The treaty-makers inflicted a terrible wound on the souls of millions of Magyars by their partition of the homeland; but they left them with an unflinching antidote for the assuaging of their sorrow in the enthusiasm for repatriation which burns in their brains. Hungary to-day is struggling, as is no other nation, to keep its national character and maintain its own culture and civilization. The intense patriotism of those who have been cut off from their homeland is inevitably welding closer the eight millions who have not suffered the loss of nationality.

Almost immediately after Trianon, Bolshevism broke out in Hungary and lasted for five months, from

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March to July in 1919. Not only did Bolshevism officially abolish such titles as 'peasant' and 'peer,' but it forbade any such thing as co-operation between the classes. If you were a peer, or an honest bourgeois, or a distinguished man of learning, there was only one thing for you in Hungary during the period of the Red Rule: seizure by the Soviet and either instant torture and death, or lingering suffering and ultimate extinction. If you were a peasant, you were (at first) invited to help yourself to whatsoever you desired of your late master's possessions. Now, here is the extraordinary part of it all: the peasant mistrusted the Soviet. The simple-minded peasants, whom the revolutionaries regarded as mere machines for the producing of corn to feed the Red Army, took everything that was said to them with a grain of salt. Thus, when a Red official installed himself in the chateau formerly inhabited by the local Seigneur and offered the field-worker a portrait by, say, Lely, or a dinner set of old Herend porcelain for his cottage, the field worker politely declined such gifts.

'The Seigneur,' he appears to have reasoned to himself, 'owns this house, or at least he used to; and, until such time as the Seigneur tells me that he has given it to this Soviet person to do with as he will, I'm taking nothing!'

This refusal of gifts and of invitations to indulge in plunder must have seemed odd to the revolutionaries, but I don't think it worried them greatly. Peasants, after all, were fools: when they could not be led, and it was necessary for them to be driven, the knout, which had been introduced into Hungary from Russia along with Bolshevism, would doubtless prove efficacious.

Oddly enough, the knout, as well as the knife and the thumb-screw, failed; even the rope seems to have

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been quite powerless to impress upon the idiot minds of the peasants that the Soviet wanted something from them—corn! Béla Kun, a Hungarian Jew, educated and subsidised by the Soviet, was the headpiece of Bolshevism in Hungary. When, as People's Commissioner, he took up his quarters in the most fashionable hotel in Budapest, he coined a most persuasive watchword: 'Rise, starving Proletarians, rise!' This phrase worked wonders while food supplies in the Capital lasted; but when the starving proletarians, who had for a short time been enjoying the delights of champagne, prime meats, Danube salmon, and all the rest of it, found that corn supplies were down to nothing, they began to murmur against the new powers.

Things were not looking well, and Béla Kun found it necessary to appeal to the better feelings of the Hungarian peasantry. Kun tried every conciliatory means in his power to obtain the corn which was so vitally needed if the revolution was to continue to flourish. He even went so far as to print false banknotes with which to pay for supplies. But the peasants—poor, stolid fools—were not to be deceived. It was not their accustomed way of doing business. Sorry, Mr. Kun, they said, in effect, we're keeping our corn; you keep yourself to yourself—a fine triumph for conservatism and the old way of doing things. Of course, the peasants suffered for their stubbornness. Torture, mutilation, and hanging—a fierce campaign began. But the land labourers stood firm, refused to give up their principles, and finally brought about the downfall of Bolshevism in their country.

Bolshevism was the first great trouble which Hungary had to face after the catastrophe of Trianon; a trouble which has left its mark on the people, and the effects of which can be seen to this day.

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The second calamity, which nearly brought about the complete wreck of Hungary, was the collapse of the nation's finances. By the treaty of Trianon Hungary lost the all-important raw materials of industrial production: iron, coal, and wood. Although in quite a number of cases the new frontiers laid down by Trianon left to Hungary her factories, the vital raw ingredients necessary to feed those factories were cut off and given to one or the other of the new Succession States (Roumania, Czecho-Slovakia, and Jugoslavia). The effects of this loss of raw materials, coupled with the havoc wrought by the revolution, can be judged by considering that, between November, 1918, and January, 1920, the value of the Hungarian crown on the Zurich exchange fell from over thirty-nine to under four centimes. The most dire result of the fall in the currency was the shrinkage in the income of the State. Moreover, at this time, many of the State's resources—such as the railways and postal and telegraphic services—were in a more or less wrecked condition, and were thus producing but a fraction of their normal returns. Money had to be found for repairing these services, and yet more money was needed for the support of the tremendously increased number of State dependants.

After the war, not only had the salaries of State officials to be raised to counteract the depreciation of the crown, but there were also wounded soldiers, bereaved relatives, and a constant stream of refugees to be considered. Perhaps the most alarming of these new liabilities were the refugees. Thousands of these people fled, or were driven, from their homes in the Old Hungary into the new and appallingly poverty-stricken post-war Hungary; and, as most of them were of the official class, and consequently quite unfitted for land work (even had such work been available), it was the most natural thing in the world that they should

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flock to Budapest, the Capital, where already unemployment and starvation had reached menacing proportions.

At a time when conditions were so bad that anything from a fresh (and this time fatal) outbreak of Bolshevism to a Roumanian invasion might quite easily have occurred, two men successively came to the fore and helped to make straight and smooth the road along which Hungary to-day is so bravely struggling.

Roland Hegedüs, the first of these post-war pioneers, led the way by providing the vitally needed miracle which led to the partial recovery of the Hungarian currency. If, Hegedüs said to himself, he could restore the balance of the State's finances, the natural sticking powers of his fellow Magyars would do the rest. But the restoration of the national currency was a task by the side of which any two of the labours of Hercules would appear insignificant. To begin with, since the financial year 1914-15 there had been no State budget whatsoever; and, when eventually his estimates were completed, it was shown that a deficiency of six and a half thousands of millions of crowns existed, of which amount nearly three thousand millions of crowns represented Public Debts. To meet this tremendous deficit, Hegedüs intended to raise a foreign loan. The proposed foreign loan, together with the proposed restriction of the issue of bank-notes, suggested by Hegedüs, coupled with the brilliant propaganda work which he accomplished, resulted in the rapid rise on the Zurich exchange of the crown in 1921.

Count Stephen Bethlen, who has held office as Prime Minister since 1921, the man who, above all others, has done so much to put Hungary on her feet again, is not the sort of person one would at first sight presume to be capable of great things. He is rather like our own Mr. Baldwin in that he surrounds himself

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with an atmosphere of tobacco-smoke and prize pigs; like Mr. Baldwin, too, he is not personally ambitious; unlike Mr. Baldwin, though (and in this respect he seems to me to crystallise the essential difference between two so similar peoples as the Hungarians and the English), Count Bethlen is a great personality with a *passionately* strong feeling for Hungary. Bethlen is a good man for the post he now holds, for he comes from a family famous in that diplomatically famous country, Transylvania, which for so long held the balance of power between Austria in the West and Turkey in the East. But that is rather in passing . . .

I suppose the greatest thing which Bethlen has accomplished for Hungary was to secure the flotation of the £11,700,000 Hungarian loan in 1924. The difficulties to be overcome in the procuring of this loan were almost insuperable, chief among them being the apparent lack of security to be offered in exchange. Yet the loan must be raised, if Hungary were to continue to live. The good effects of Hegedüs's work were beginning to wear off, and the crown was falling once more with alarming rapidity. Bethlen set out on a tour of the Entente Capitals. His reception was mixed; obstacle after obstacle cropped up and was surmounted, till, eventually, with the aid of the League of Nations, the loan was successfully floated, and Hungary was enabled to carry on.

Outside the sphere of international finance, in which Count Bethlen reminds me vividly of that great Catholic, the late Sir Joseph Ward, the Prime Minister had his difficulties at home. The pros and cons of the 'King Question'; the belligerent attitude of the Small Entente; the trade relations of Hungary with her neighbours, all have been problems to test the skill and the firmness of the greatest of men. It is because he has shown both skill and firmness in a marked degree during his nine difficult years of office that I rank

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Count Bethlen as the supreme Hungarian in post-war Hungary.

These, then, are the two personalities who appear to me to have had most to do with Hungary's recovery from a series of blows as deadly as any that have been dealt to a nation of recent times. There are others, of course, men who have acted and are acting now with an unselfishness and objectiveness of purpose which is more than admirable; but these are the two who have stood out as the deliverers of a great nation in its hour of need. Noble in character and ideal, they belong to that class of the community which was called 'the nobility.' If that class has survived in Hungary, its survival has been due to the true nobility and greatness of the peasantry in times of greatest trial.

CHARLES CUNNINGHAM.