



Budapestre vonatkozó újságcikkek

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THE WORLD OVER

Budapest

By G. MURRAY

THE East and the West meet at Budapest, and their contact is like the grip of interlaced fingers. There is no merging and no clean cleavage; rather a series of arrested developments, each breaking off short against an opposing force. The result is a city of baffling contrasts and perversities, which loses in intensity what it gains in variety. Its passions are sudden and fierce, but not deep; its patience is easy-going slowness rather than a purposeful waiting; its atmosphere of fatalism is born of carelessness rather than of fanaticism. It is a city of incomplete characteristics and imperfect civilisation.

In one respect Budapest is truly Eastern. It is dominated by colour, which turns sordidness into picturesqueness and rags into a semblance of magnificence. It can no longer claim to be an imperial city, but at sunset it still assumes the imperial purple. The atmosphere, always tinged with purple, becomes a luminous rose-red haze. Through it buildings gleam white and gold against massive indigo shadows, and here and there it is pierced by the glint of a copper-domed basilica or palace. The pageantry passes, and the Western sky fades to emerald and primrose. Then for one brief moment Budapest is grey—a dead city chained down by a river of steel. Once more the impression passes; and the city falls under the spell of night, vivid, warm and sensuous. Buildings, bridges, and river-craft are alive again with the dancing of multitudinous lights, which mingle with the stars in the depths of the ebony waters.

Life in Budapest means, in the summer at least, street life. There are hotels and shops for the sophisticated, but the game of life takes place in the open. Market stalls are ubiquitous, but in addition the instinct for street trading runs riot once a week. The streets are lined with articles for sale. At the edge of the pavement sit rows of women, each one presiding over her particular square of sacking, on which are piled up cucumbers, plums, water-melons, or some other eatable. In another corner a sea of blue enamel ware surges far out into the highway, further on are stalls laden with every variety of household utensil. Festoons of "salami," the Hungarian variety of sausage, hang gracefully across the stalls, adding the reek of garlic to that of decaying vegetable

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matter. The poulterer's stall, as known in England, is absent. Fowls are bought alive and killed at home. The stranger, unaware of this practice, is apt to wonder at the frequent sight of women carrying live chickens on the top of their baskets of vegetables, or chasing the more recalcitrant birds down the street.

Live stock, indeed, forms an important feature of Budapest. On every available patch of grass there is always an assortment of domestic animals, goats, pigs, ducks, geese and hens. Each animal has its own guardian, usually a very old man or a very young child.

The characteristic note of colour is very marked in the clothing of the people. A certain number of women work as stone-breakers, sand and brick carriers, &c., and the vividness of their peasant dresses and the gaudy handkerchiefs on their heads create the impression of an Eastern street scene in an Opera. Sometimes a peasant woman in full gala dress is seen, complete with head-dress and top-boots, her full, pleated skirt swishing like a long kilt. One has to go into the country, however, to see the men in the white divided skirts which constitute their native costume, and which give them the appearance of mediæval saints who have accidentally acquired the habit of smoking absurdly long pipes.

An utter indifference to time marks the native of Budapest. There are numerous street clocks, but they are presumably symbolical. They bear witness, in a variety of symbolical figures, to the existence of time, but ignore the tyranny of its exactness. But Hungary is essentially mediæval, externally in such

matters as its almost barbaric processions, internally in its in-consequent legislation, or its gusty Parliamentary sittings with their squabbles and personal recriminations. One cannot take a nation seriously which ordained by law until quite recently that a Jewish child should go to school on Saturdays, but should not be allowed to write on that day of rest. Everything is a little irrational, like the solemnity of a child that is playing at being grown up.

But it is, on the whole, a pleasant life, played out to the music of the gypsy bands, which grind out voluptuous melancholy or wild melodies of ineffectual passion on the banks of the blue Danube, with "the sun to rule the day and the moon and the stars to rule the night."

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