

# GUSTAVE EIFFEL

I N H U N G A R Y



The name of Gustave Eiffel, designer of the Eiffel Tower in Paris, is universally known throughout the educated world. Few people know, however, that before the Tower was built, three works by Eiffel, or by the companies which he headed, were constructed in Hungary.

The first was the Margaret Bridge (1872-75), Budapest's second permanent bridge. The second was the hall of the present Western Station (1877), and finally the Tisza bridge at Szeged (1880).

## THE MARGARET BRIDGE

Up to 1872 Buda and Pest, the two parts of the Hungarian capital, were linked by only a

single permanent bridge—the Suspension Bridge designed by Thierney William Clark and erected in 1839-1849. In order to speed the traffic of goods from and to Vienna, it was necessary to have a second bridge.

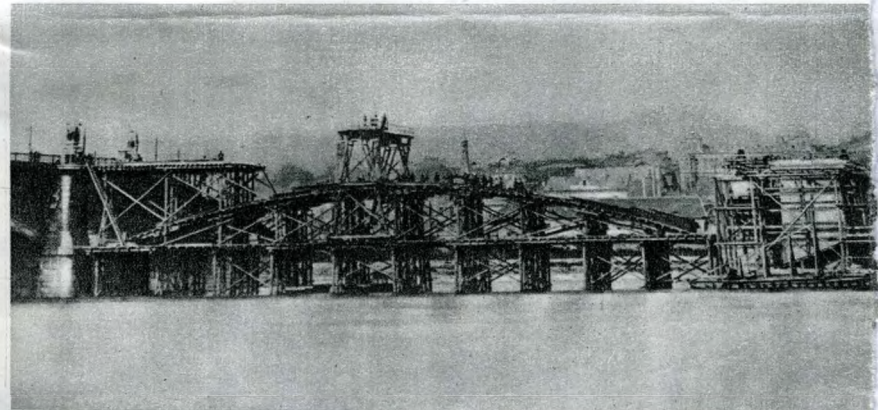
The Eiffel Company, or rather one of their engineers, E. Gouin, was given a commission to prepare the plans. The *Société de Construction des Battignoles* headed, and mostly owned, by Eiffel was awarded a contract for building the main bridge. The sub-structure and the steel construction were made in Hungary. The overall length of the bridge was 607.12 metres, the width 16.84 metres.

Towards the end of the Second

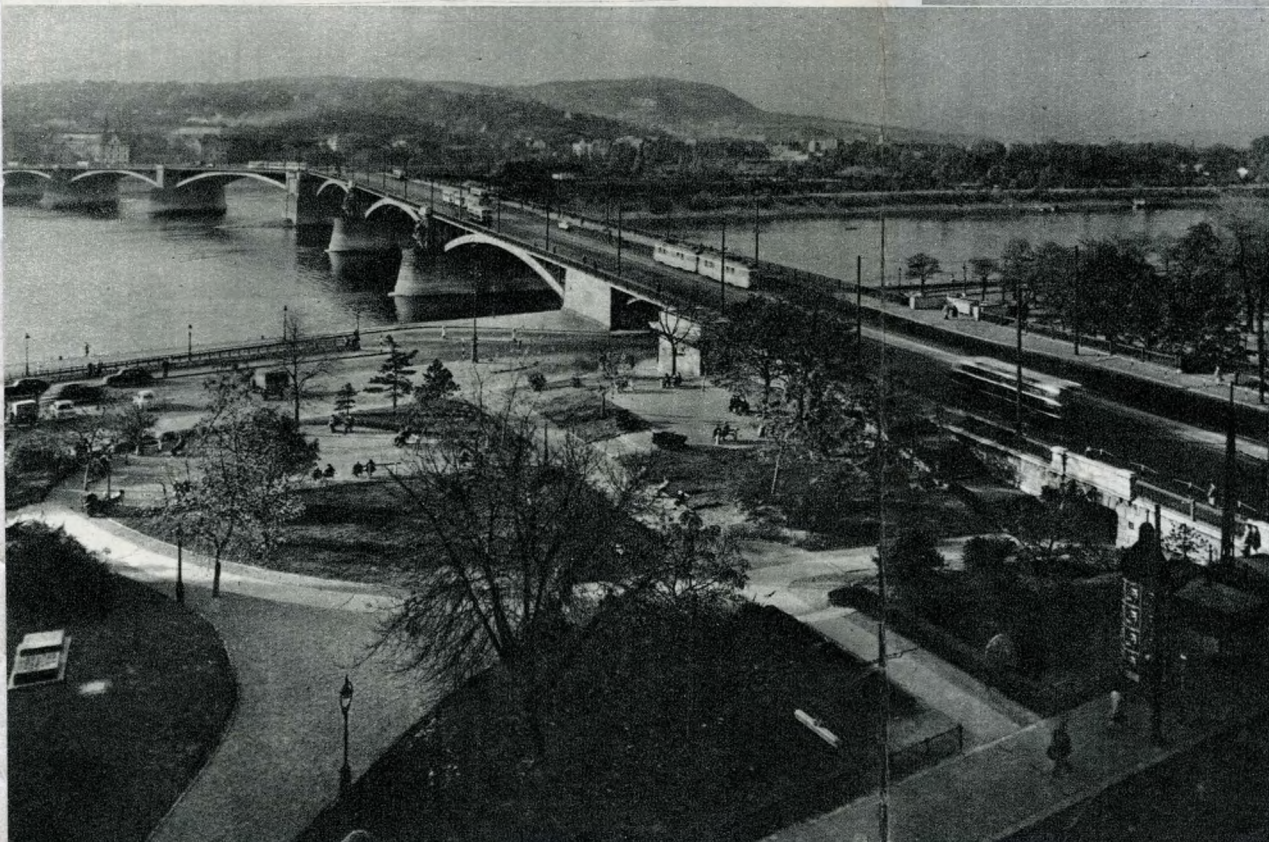
World War Hitler's fleeing army blew up all the Budapest bridges, including the Margaret Bridge. In the course of reconstruction after 1945 the bridge was restored with both sides broadened without fundamental changes having to be made in either the structure or the outlines.

The Margaret Bridge passes

about a hundred metres from the tip of Margaret Island. The branch bridge leading to Margaret Island was designed by Hungarian engineers and built in 1899-1900. Up to 1896 a horse-drawn tram passed over Margaret Bridge. The amortization costs of the bridge were recovered through the toll charge which



Margaret Bridge as it was rebuilt after World War II.



In 1900, a branch was built, linking the bridge with Margaret Island.

Margaret Bridge at the time it was being constructed. ▶

was only abolished during the revolution of 1918.

## THE WESTERN STATION

The second Eiffel contract in Hungary was for the hall of the present Western Station. The previous hall had been designed and built in the romantic style by the eminent Hungarian architect Mátyás Zitterbarth. It was in this wooden building that

trains from Vienna and the West generally arrived, and from here that they started on the return journey.

Thirty years later, the hall, built in 1844-46 was to prove inadequate and a fire hazard. At this time the railway lines to the West were owned by the Austrian State Railway Company, and it was they who commissioned the *Société de Construction des Battignoles* to build a new hall with a steel structure and a span of 44 metres. So that traffic could proceed without a stop, the work was done above the old building which was only demolished when the new one was complete. The station buildings were designed by Austrian architects.

Unfortunately the artistic contours of Eiffel's hall are not seen at their best, for the hall fronts on one of Budapest's busiest thoroughfares and its facade blends into the row of apartment blocks surrounding it.

The Western Station, originally called Pest Station.



Photographs by Béla Soproni and Sándor Mező

### THE TISZA BRIDGE AT SZEGED

At Szeged, one of Hungary's largest provincial cities, Eiffel's firm obtained a contract by competitive bidding for the construction of the Tisza Bridge. One of the conditions of the competition was that the designer must also undertake the construction job.

Civil engineers who did not

have a sufficient backing in capital could not therefore submit tenders in their own names. This must have been the reason why the excellent Hungarian bridge designer, János Feketeházy, sold his plan to the Paris firm of Eiffel (now no longer a company), on the following terms: for his cash expenses connected with the job he was to receive 1000 golden forints (corresponding to 100 golden Napoleon coins), and if the firm

of Eiffel were granted the contract, he would get a further 10,000 forints (or 1,000 Napoleon coins). The condition was that secrecy must mutually be observed.

Eiffel himself submitted several designs, but finally at the public adjudication of the tenders the jury accepted that of Feketeházy, which also bore the signature of Eiffel.

Feketeházy received the agreed fee.

The committee's findings on viewing the Eiffel plan, actually done by Feketeházy, were as follows: "It is so extraordinarily beautiful as to be an ornament to any metropolis. The design excels not only by its beauty, but also by its modest estimates. The proportions and elegance of its fine, and yet daringly conceived contours assure an eminent place for it among bridge structures. It resembles the Margaret Bridge but its structure is far more beautiful."

In 1930, on the fiftieth anniversary of the erection of the bridge, a movement was initiated to have the name of the real designer, János Feketeházy, engraved on the memorial tablet at the bridgehead. However, by the time the debate about the authorship of the designs was concluded by the recognition of Feketeházy's work, Hitler's army had dynamited this bridge, too, in the Second World War. In the course of reconstruction a larger and more modern bridge was built in place of that by Eiffel and Feketeházy.

Two of the three works of the Eiffel firm are still extant in Hungary. The first, the Margaret Bridge, has been broadened; the second, the hall of the Western Station stands in its original form.

László Faragó

