

Budapest, the Queen of the Danube

Not so far from the point where the Danube turns south, lies one of the most interesting and most beautiful cities, Budapest. It was not by mere coincidence that Budapest was built on this place, but natural conditions and geographical harmony find this beautiful city predestined to take rank as the capital of the Magyar kingdom. The great Hungaria plains meet here; and the last row of hills from the western range touches the lovely lowlands here. This circumstance, too, has made the city an historic feature in European progress. Budapest was the gateway to European civilisation, as it lies where the chief routes meet, and diverge from east to west, and from west to east; and connect the main routes from the north and the south.

It is no wonder that the ancient Romans recognised its extraordinary political and strategical importance and founded here the military town of *Aquincum*, still to be seen in ruins. But the real importance begins with the settlement of the « Magyars » (the Hungarians) around 1000 A.D. It was at this time that King Stephan the First became the first and the Saint King of Hungary, and founded the first Christian State in this part of Europe. He wore the title of defender of civilisation. After his time the town of Buda became and for centuries remained the very fortress and *bulwark of the whole western civilisation*. Remains of this old Buda are still to be seen. It was up against the constant attacks of the eastern barbarian people, and later on against the Tartars and the Turks. At the time of the terrible Tartar invasion. Buda was built on the site of the present castle-hill.

The flourishing period began and reached its zenith under *Mathias Corvinus*, the son of *John Hunyady*, the victorious hero of the Turkish wars, under whose residence (the so-called

Mathias period in Hungarian history) at the palace numerous scholars, artists, and diplomats found a pleasant meeting place, representing some of the finest Renaissance schools of the fifteenth century. After this came a dark period. In the sixteenth century Buda fell into the hands of the Turks, who held the town for the following 150 years under Mohammedan yoke. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries Hungaries sought protection against the Turks under the régime of the Habsburgs and through their aid reconquered the town of Buda in 1686. After this the country began to recover, as also the old city, fulfilling her unique historical role of defender of civilisation. This of hers began to develop during the last century, especially from the time of the Palatinate of Archduke Joseph and Count Szechenyi and under Francis Joseph. She has and now nearly one million inhabitants,

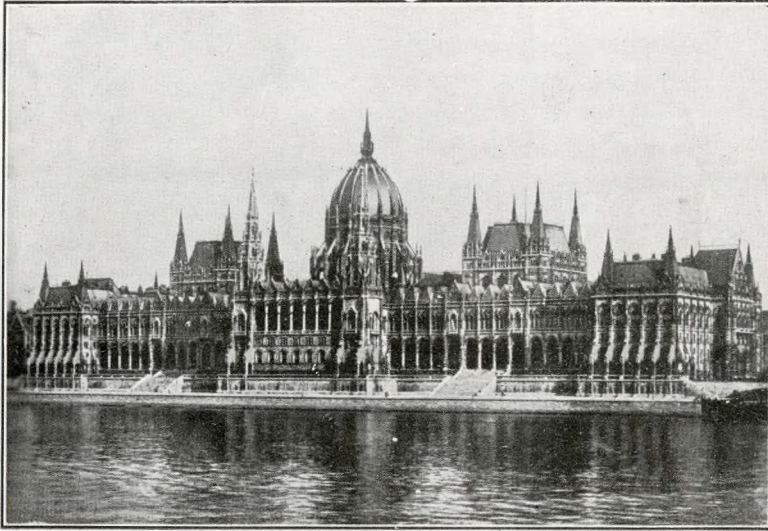
and has become the tenth largest city in Europe and one of the finest cities in the world.

The city with her wonderful situation on the majestic Danube — a situation with which only few cities of the Continent can compete — surrounded with the charming wreath of green hills, crowned on the top with the pompous Royal Palace, almost hanging over the lovely water below, all surrounded with beautiful parks, leaves to every foreigner an impression not to be forgotten. The most powerful river of Central Europe cuts the town into parts. On the left side we see an ocean of houses



CORONATION CHURCH, BUDAPEST.

whereas on the right there are rocky mountainous slopes, and lovely hills, all spotted about by towers of palaces and beautiful residential houses. Buda with her historical relics, the Royal



HOUSE OF PARLIAMENT, BUDAPEST.

Palace, the old *Coronation Church*, has been for centuries the scene of all great historical ceremonies and has one of the most beautifully painted Gothic churches in Europe, quite strange with its orientally influenced inner fresco decoration, surrounded by the quiet ancient mansions of the old aristocracy, and in the midst of the life of the « *Petite bourgeoisie*. » All this takes us back some centuries and gives us an impression of those past times of our grandfathers. In contrast to this: *Pest* (on the left side of the Danube) is a *large modern metropolis* of great style, with splendid Paris like boulevards, superb and richly decorated buildings, first class hotels, full of the works of modern culture, museums, theatres, public buildings.

At the top of the fortified hill we see the most wonderfully situated royal palace of the world, and further on on the top of the other hill, called the *Gellert Hill*, we see an *historical fortification* with its stylish gray walls, covering the whole plateau of the hill as a reminder of the two contrasts of time: peace and war.

If we arrive by steamer, the surprise we get is caused by the palaces all along the Danube embankment. In the *evening* we see *thousands of lanterns and electric lights all lighted up along both sides of the embankment*; the foreigner perceives a fairy scene all glittering before his eyes, and the view we get can easily compete with all the beauties of Venice.

One of the most striking features of the Danube panorama is the *Parliament building*, facing the Danube with her whole façade. This building is, in comparison of its enormous measures and sumptuous inner decoration, excepting the London Houses of Parliament, without *equal in Europe*. It is built in Gothic-Renaissance style imposingly crowned by a dome and by numerous towers. Near by is the *St. Stephen's dome*, the largest

and most beautifully ornamented church of Budapest. This dome is in pure Renaissance style, but in the shape of a Greek cross, combining and signifying the western and eastern influence in Arts. On the lake of the city park is situated the *Museum for Fine Arts*, a building in pure Greek style, with a collection having some rare Raffaels, Correggios, Titians, Palmas, Murillos, Geoyas, Van Dyks, Rembrands and Munkacsys.

The variety of impression given by the city is still further raised by the busy *life full of national features* which catches the visitors attention, be it on the street, or in the numerous and rich coffee houses, where, in the evenings *gypsy bands* play their fiery or sometimes dreamy tunes. Towards sunset people promenade in thousand on the famous Danube embankments, bordered with fragrant acacias and which serve as pleasant meeting places in the summer evenings, and as sunny winter meetings for fashionable society. Here are the finest *luxury hotels*, the *Ritz*, the *Grand Hotel Hungaria*, the *Bristol*, the *St. Gellert*, and the finest palaces, all along both quays. Big modern steamers of the Royal Hungaria Steamship Company are anchoring along side the landing stages or moving about on the river. Little but swift ferry boats glide on the soft waves. Somewhat further on big cargo boats are lying idle before the warehouses.

From these embankments we can enjoy the unique Danube panorama standing in front of the granite rocks of the Mount St. Gellert, or looking from the arcades of the Royal gardens, at the foot of which we find the *Suspension Bridge*, the most *classical feature of the city* connecting with its splendid arch the two parts of the town.

But the sight is near to being a dream, when an early morning mist is flating over the river, the silvery waves are glittering



CASTLE VAJDA HUNYAD IN THE CITY PARK, BUDAPEST.

and the numerous towers are appearing in the rosy air, backed by the fire-shone silhouette of the mountains. The Danube gives not only beauty and variety to the city, but also a great economic importance. South from the bridges are the numerous

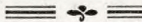
warehouses, mills factories, docks and cargo stations and just now they are building the large commercial harbour which make



DANUBE PANORAMA, BUDAPEST.

Budapest the largest inland harbour in Europe, and also an important free port in the very heart of Europe.

Painting, sculpture, architecture and music are on a very high



standard. Masters, such as Liszt, Volkman, Erkel, Goldmark, Kubay and Donnanyi have lived here; and have made Budapest one of the centres of musical life.

Budapest has not only a historic, artistic and economic importance, but has a splendid future as a *unique watering* place. We can very truly name Budapest *the city of cure-wells* and baths, because no other city in Europe has so many curewells and baths built on such a grand scale. To-day all the comforts and distractions of a great city, the beauty of nature, many matchless watering places are prominent. Bordering the right bank of the Danube arise numerous hills, where we find thermal and mineral springs which have been famous for centuries past and *have made Budapest a second Karlsbad*. In Budapest a remedy is found for all kinds of sickness. Among the mineral waters the Hunyadi bitter water has become famous all over the world. The waters of the St Gellert and Lucas bath performed wonders against rheumatism, gout and nervous diseases, etc. These springs are turning out about ten million litres of mineral water daily; and the baths are *luxuriously fitted up with the utmost elegance, especially the St. Gellert baths* owned by the Municipality. Another splendid bathing establishment is situated on the St Margaret's Island, which, with its charming lawns, shadowy promenades, and magnificent rose gardens, is a favourite excursion place of society and a fine resort for sporting people.

So in every respect, Budapest is a city where tourists may find enjoyment and attraction. This city is the "*Queen of the Danube*."

D^r B. MATÉKA.

