

## SIX WEEKS IN HUNGARY

PARTLY on business, but chiefly for pleasure, we decided to pay a visit to Hungary this autumn, our stay being limited to six all too short and happy weeks, our return taking place a few days only previous to the last exciting episode.

Apart from the beauty of its scenery, the two prevailing features of Hungary are space and dust. Spacious are its palaces, its castles and its houses, its villages and limitless plains. The villages are all large, the main street being as wide as, perhaps even wider than, Portland Place, and contain 6000 or 7000 inhabitants. The cottages are not unlike our own, but are uniform, built of cement and bricks, large enough to contain two or three generations of a family.

Everything in this country makes for size and grandeur. Even the trees partake of this natural characteristic, particularly the birch and plane trees, which are as large as good-sized English oaks, and grow to an enormous height. I am speaking now of the trees in the beautiful private parks, many of which we visited. These much resemble our own. Here I saw chiefly plane and birch trees, firs, acacias, ash and weeping willows, few oaks, but many specimen trees, such as American nut and tulip trees.

My admiration for everything Hungarian does, however, not extend to the roads. Of these I can only speak with great reserve. With the exception of the main roads, they are simply rough tracks, full of ruts and enormous holes, and with dust at least a foot deep.

The main roads are bordered with acacias, firs and planes. On either side, as far as the eye can reach, are immense fields, where graze huge flocks of oxen, sheep, and the long-haired pigs peculiar to this country, tended by the shepherd, often a child of, perhaps, ten to twelve years old. These fields alternate with vineyards and fields of maize, growing close to the roadside, which have no hedges. Neither hedges nor palisades divide the property of the different owners, which appears to be distributed on the allotment system.

Budapesth, which we made our headquarters between our country visits, is, I should say—with perhaps the single exception

of Constantinople—the most beautiful capital in Europe. The old town, Buda, is built on the slope of a steep hill, crowned by its magnificent royal palace and ancient citadel. It is divided from the modern Pesth by the Danube, grand and magnificent, but certainly not *blue*. Pesth is built on perfectly flat ground, having as a background the beautiful Schwabenberg and Blocksberg mountains.

Steam ferry-boats ply continuously backwards and forwards across the river, starting work with piercing whistles before 6 a.m., as we found to our cost, the quay being just below our windows. Two splendid bridges connect the two cities. A suspension bridge, formed of one enormous span, said to be the finest in the world, is called the Elizabeth-brücke, the other, which has two stone couchant lions at each end, is called the Ketten-brücke, and is of comparatively modern construction. A story is told that the architect, after surveying his completed work with great satisfaction, turned to a friend standing by, and laughingly challenged him to find a single fault or blemish in his masterpiece. 'Yes,' replied the friend, 'I can do so, your lions have no tongues!' And so it is, for in the wide half-opened jaws no tongues are to be seen. Tradition states that the poor architect thereupon committed suicide.

The architecture of the churches and various buildings is flamboyant and eastern in character, but with a beauty of its own and very distinctive; size and dignity being the first considerations. The private houses that I saw were, with two notable exceptions, and these of a palatial type, all eighteenth century, with the porticos and columns that one sees in houses of the period.

A Government car was placed at our disposal, and in this we made long expeditions to visit various Hungarian magnates, who received us with the charming cordiality and kindness that are the characteristics of this delightful race. My husband had interested himself in their cause, and had been able to do their country some slight service, and for this they simply could not sufficiently show their gratitude towards us. From the prince to the peasant the Hungarian is a born *grand seigneur*, with all the instincts of a great gentleman and the manners of a king.

Our driver, accustomed to drive the military, and, occasionally, competing in motor races, could hardly be described as *le chauffeur de Madame*. His great idea was to arrive at his destination with as little delay as possible, and he had a supreme contempt for peasants and police alike, and, indeed, for any kind of official. We tore along at breakneck speed, the car provided with an ear-piercing whistle which he used persistently, clearing the roads, and scattering everything and everybody to right and

left. I besought that we might slow down occasionally when the road was extra bad, for we were flung from one end of the car to the other, jolted and bruised, bumping up and down like a jack-in-the-box when the spring is released, and our heads almost wrenched off our shoulders. My protests, however, were of little avail, so we had just to sit tight and make the best of it.

Owing to the troubles in Western Hungary we were provided with every kind of *laisser-passer*. Our driver, with a most exaggerated idea of our importance, much resented our being stopped or questioned, hurling invectives at the different officials, and shouting 'Army car!' in a grandiloquent tone. This he alternated with insulting remarks on the brain capacity of the various soldiers and officials, posted at the entrances to the villages we passed through, advising them to try and improve their memories, and not to make him repeat the same answer more than four times. This species of *badinage* might, perhaps, have been a little dangerous in the circumstances, but fortune smiled on us and we got into no trouble. Our credentials being found satisfactory, the various officials stepped back, stood smartly to attention, saluted, and we passed triumphantly on.

As we tore along, the dust rose in dense clouds behind us, completely obliterating our tracks. No one who has not experienced Hungarian dust can have the faintest idea of what it means. There are three kinds, white, grey, and black, and I have met them all. The white dust is found chiefly on the roads, the grey dust in the towns, and the black in the hotels. All these possess a peculiarly greasy and adhesive faculty that eats into woollen material and is very difficult to get rid of.

One can drive for miles and miles without passing either a dwelling or a human being. In other parts, however, one meets countless carts, driven by smart-looking peasants, taking their maize or hay to market. Some of these carts are drawn by oxen and some by the lovely little high-spirited Hungarian horses, prancing along, jingling their bells, the mares having their foals trotting loose beside them. These they look after until the foals are six months old, when the mothers then refuse to have anything more to do with them.

These little horses, with their high action and beautiful satin coats, look very light for the work, but the four-wheeled carts are not heavy, and these slightly-built thoroughbreds are more suitable for the dusty roads than heavy draught horses would be. I only saw about six horses of the cart-horse build all the time I was in Hungary.

The Hungarian is a born 'whip.' Madame, too, who invariably accompanies her spouse to market, occasionally takes the reins, which she handles with consummate skill.

The horses objected very much to our motor, plunging violently as we rushed past them, and attempting to bolt, thus narrowly escaping upsetting the vehicle. They were, however, quickly controlled and subdued by the whistling and voice of their owner, who showed plainly that he objected to us quite as much as did his horses. Some of the carts were drawn by one horse, attached to an enormous pole, which projects some way beyond the horse. The effect is very peculiar and looks as if the second horse had been forgotten.

The Hungarian peasant is of magnificent physique, tall, with immense shoulders and great strength of build. The women are, for the most part, tall and good looking, with a splendid carriage, due probably to the heavy weights they carry on their heads. They walk from the hips, with heads erect, straight as their own poplars, and with a natural grace and dignity impossible to be artificially acquired. The children and young women wear nothing on their heads, the older women wear a kerchief, and no hat or bonnets. One sees many girls with Titian red hair and the creamy complexions that go with this colouring.

But the great beauties are to be found amongst the *Czigánys*. These curious people, hailing originally from Hindustan, are a race apart. They lead a wandering life, living in tents or huts outside the towns, which they are not allowed to enter. They have no ethical principles, and if they possess laws of their own punishment for stealing has no place amongst them, for the *Czigánys*, both male and female, are inveterate thieves. They do not recognise the obligations of the Ten Commandments, they have no morals and practically no religion. Although they are supposed to love their children, it not infrequently happens that a gipsy mother will hold her child by the legs and beat the father with it. They carry on the ancient craft of coppersmiths or workers in metal, but as a whole they are hopelessly idle and thriftless, and although attempts have been made to give them regular employment such attempts have been futile, and they prefer to exist chiefly by stealing. Music is born in the *Czigánys*, and in this art they are unsurpassed. They compose their own wonderful music, some of their most famous melodies dating from the eighteenth century, and they play entirely by ear. A band of *Czigánys* will improvise for hours in the most enchanting way, led by the first violin. Their music is wild and very plaintive and almost entirely in the minor key.

We passed a band of these *Czigánys* on one of our excursions, camped outside a town, and the car slowed down in order that we might see them. It was, however, found inadvisable to stop, for in an instant we were surrounded by crowds of children, most of them stark naked or with one scanty and ragged garment covering

their little brown bodies. They swarmed round the car, clasping their poor little hands and beseeching us for money, which we threw them. Had we stopped they would probably have invaded the car, and as they are indescribably dirty this would have been unpleasant.

We visited the ancient city of Pressburg, where the kings of Hungary were formerly crowned, having to cross the frontier into Czecho-Slovakia in order to do so. There had been fighting going on the day before close to where we were staying, and the Czechs were evidently in great alarm of a Hungarian invasion. As we approached the frontier we came upon Czech soldiers in full war equipment, lying about in rudely constructed trenches, wearing their helmets and with their rifles at the ready. Machine guns were trained on to our road, and I felt as if the soldiers might very well fire on us, as they regarded us with most unfriendly eyes as if they would have done so with no great reluctance. We were well provided with *laissez-passers* and permits of all kinds, and these the frontier guards scanned very suspiciously, with surly, disagreeable faces, keeping us waiting an unconscionably long time while they endeavoured, sometimes quite futilely, to master the contents.

An English gentleman, who accompanied us, made an expedition into Western Hungary and conversed with some of the insurgents. These assured him that they would never give up their country to Austrian rule, but that they would fight on to the death. They received him with the most unfeigned cordiality, and before he left them, they, our late enemies, drank with the greatest enthusiasm to England, 'the land of the free.'

We met everywhere different victims of the Bolshevists and heard their experiences. The account given me by a certain Countess A. of what she underwent during her imprisonment in a Bolshevik prison made me marvel more than ever at the limitless endurance of the human frame and brain.

This lady and her husband were visited one day at their house in Budapesth by the Red soldiers, who carried them off, telling their children, the eldest a boy of eleven, that they would never see their parents again. Count and Countess A. were imprisoned together at first, then the Countess was taken from her husband and thrown into a room with five women of the lowest class. She had nothing but straw to lie on, and she and her companions were not allowed to leave the room for any purpose whatever during the eight days that she spent there. The sanitary arrangements consisted of a hole in the middle of the floor. Twice a day she was brought food; in the morning a cup of water, a piece of bread, and a small piece of bacon; in the evening bread and water again.

She fancied that one of her jailors seemed rather more human than the rest. Vain thought! Anyhow, she implored him to find out for her how her husband was, and to take him her bit of bacon, which she said he would need more than she did. The man took the bacon and went away. Next morning he returned with the bacon, saying to her: 'Your husband will not need bacon any more.' implying that Count A. was dead. This was fiendish cruelty on the man's part, for Count A. was not dead, and was liberated with his wife at the end of eight days, as suddenly and inexplicably as they had been imprisoned. But for days before she knew of his safety, this poor lady had to endure all the agony of suspense, not knowing whether her husband was dead or alive.

Some other Hungarian friends of ours who received visits from Bolsheviks were more lucky, in that they were neither separated nor imprisoned. They were told, however, 'This house is not yours, nothing is yours; it all belongs to the State; you have a right to *nothing*, not even your life.'

One of the country houses we stayed in was visited by the Red soldiers during the absence of its owner. His wife had for some weeks the nerve-shattering experience of a Bolshevik sleeping next door to her. He used to come into her bedroom in the night, and lean over her as she lay in bed, in order to assure himself that she had not escaped. I asked her if she was not terrified; she replied no; that she somehow felt he would do her no harm, nor did he.

The attitude most people adopted with these savages, which appears to have been the right one, was to take everything they did and every enormity they committed as a kind of joke and as a matter of course, and on no account to show any sign of annoyance or ill-temper.

Some of the episodes were not without their touch of humour. One château the Reds visited was filled with priceless treasures, miniatures in particular. These the owner, Count B., crammed hastily into his pockets and even into his boots, whilst his daughter was delaying the Bolsheviks in a parley at the gates. When the Bolsheviks had finally to be admitted to the château and were taken by Count B. through the various rooms, he paused before a quantity of Tauchnitz volumes which filled one of the bookcases: 'English books,' he pointed out. 'English books!' exclaimed the erudite Bolsheviks with bated breath, these must be of immense value! taking immediate possession of the lot, and leaving the valuable books and manuscripts behind.

The remembrance of this delightful trip I shall always cherish as a most interesting and unique experience.

E. NEWTON.