

Budapest Brought to New York's East Side

WHEN the newly arrived adventurous youth from Budapest gets homesick his friends take him round to the East Side Hungarian cafe that looks like a hundred such places in the beloved town he has left behind. It exists not to tickle the jaded palates of strangers in search of a new sensation, but to warm the Hungarian heart.

Budapest bristles with cafes, where there are food, drink, music and society. Some are gorgeous and palatial, others are simple, still others are shabby. This one of the East Side is not exactly any of these things, though it is far nearer the last than the first. Sensation seekers come in now and then, but after two or three visits they are apt to feel that they have exhausted its possibilities. Patriotism or a sound business instinct leads the proprietor to cater to his own people.

So the little cafe goes on its own chosen fashion. The dinners vary little from week to week—just a soup, two meats, one with a sauce of horseradish or what not; two vegetables in scant portions, a sweet and coffee, with the cubit high glass of American wine and seltzer, unless you prefer beer. There is no fruit, no cheese except by request and then a delectable soft something with paprika; no outworks of any sort except on anniversary occasions, when the meal is a trifle heightened in quality, though not in price, and everybody is expected to buy a bottle of wine.

After dinner you may have a plum brandy of Hungarian origin for nearly half the price of the meal, and the man opposite you will affably offer his cigarette case. Why shouldn't he? All through the meal he has shown you, as a stranger, the most courteous attention, and has talked well upon whatever topic came up—the Balkan situation, Hungary's independence of the future, the gypsies and their music, art, literature, what you will. Or the man opposite may be a skilled artisan of some sort with a fascinating tale to tell of his adventures as a journeyman in half the capitals of Europe, a knowledge of things that most folks hardly expect a skilled artisan to include in his intellectual baggage, and manners essentially as good as anybody's.

The place is seldom crowded, and the company comes in at irregular hours. At half past 6 the tables are white and vacant. A few minutes later there is a sprinkling of guests, and soon after 7 the newcomer hardly finds a table that he may have alone. Indeed the etiquette of the place, for the most part cheerfully observed, assumes that one will take a place at any table with a vacancy rather than seize a whole table. Family parties come in and find tables which are left to them alone. There is always a sprinkling of pretty girls in the company, and sometimes there is a lady killer on the watch for contraband smiles.

Since the dinner is so cheap this is no place for display. The courageous

youth who fetches in his best girl proclaims himself a poor man, but the atmosphere of the evening is not sordid. Small tips are gracefully accepted, and habitues tip not daily, but at suitable intervals. Half the company is made up of such. Men and women exchange friendly greetings from table to table, and "Here he is," welcomes many a late comer.

The lights are agreeable, the place is low ceilinged, warm and cosy. After all, perhaps the proprietor is right in preferring to provide an excellent imitation of home for his faithful fellow countrymen, rather than in attempting to attract and hold the capricious stranger.

All the men and a few of the women smoke, so that the atmosphere has a pleasant illusory bluish tinge before the coffee is finished. Meanwhile there are few drinkers of other wine than that served along with the dinner at a fixed price, and not many permit themselves the luxury of the after coffee brandy. On holidays and when the glories of Hungary are to be celebrated it is different. Then the better wines come from the cellar, and Tokay graces the board.

On such nights, as on all nights, there is music, usually the piano as accompaniment to the redheaded, boyish looking violinist in gold bowed glasses, sometimes a song by a man with a voice worthy to honor Hungary upon an anniversary occasion. When the company is in sympathetic mood the redheaded violinist is inexhaustible. He plays and plays, while the crowd stays and grows. Musicians from neighboring engagements drop in to hear and applaud.

His host, with a thickening roll of bills in his hand, comes forth from his screened seat and beams upon the company whose presence is to enrich him. Smoke thickens; young folk will not rise for the tugging of their elders, but sit tight to hear the music and enjoy the scene of gayety. Cheese and sandwiches begin to appear toward 11 o'clock and Hungarian white wine takes its place on one and another table. Glasses are exchanged from table to table and guests move about to talk with this friend or that.

As to the redheaded violinist, he tucks his handkerchief underneath his cheek and amid respectful silence draws from his instrument the tear compelling music of the gypsies, alternated with touches of wildest merriment. He bows to rapturous applause, he must pass from table to table that the women may shake his hand, he has a bite of bread and cheese here, a glass of Tokay there.

Everybody watches the clock and all would stay its hurrying hands as the closing hour approaches. It comes a length and the music ceases, while the guests turn for their wraps and slowly pass out into the street with a good night to the bowing and smiling host. The whole company has spent far less than many a man pays for a dinner of four in an uptown restaurant.

Özp. nyomt. X X. cs. 23. sz.



Budapestre vonatkozó újságcikkek

Szerző:

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Tárgy

Hely

Idő

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