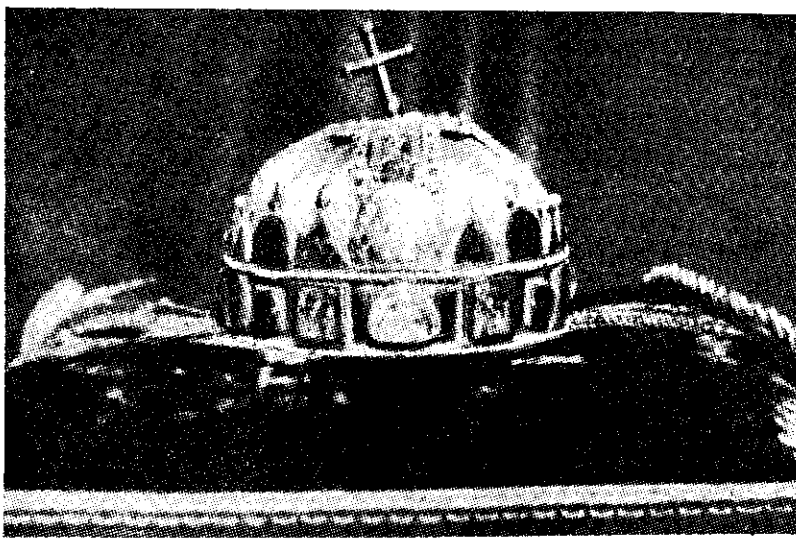




ONE SOLDIER'S EYES must always be fixed on Hungary's golden crown, where it rests within a fireproof safe in the Royal Palace



—AND THIS IS WHAT HE IS LOOKING AT: A crown that nobody wears, the royal emblem of kingless Hungary. It has known many adventures, in one of which the cross was bent.

THE QUEER CASE OF HUNGARY

HUNGARY seems a queer country to Britons. The first time they hear of it as children they are incredulous; then they laugh. Next, having concluded that it must be the land of Huns, they learn that the inhabitants are not Huns, but Magyars. Later, they discover that Magyars are not Magyars in pronunciation, but Modyors. These "Modyors" (the lesson continues) though they occupy the dead centre of Europe are not Europeans but something nearer Chinese. Though they farm a rich plain, they are desperately poor. Though their country has no king, it is called a kingdom, and is ruled by a regent. Further, this man is an admiral, though obviously, since Hungary has no coastline, there is no navy for him to command. And now, though Hungary is the first German Ally after Italy, it is the Germans and not the Allies who have occupied it!

Of course all these apparent absurdities have simple enough explanations if you know them. For example, Hungary *did* have a coastline when Horthy commanded a fleet. Similarly the Germans have taken over Hungarian government because Hungary has never been a heart-and-soul Axis partner but merely struck a mercenary bargain with the Axis, trading blood and grain for people and soil. But though the peasants for the first time for centuries went short of home-grown bread so that the Danube plain might pour oil crops instead into German war industry, and though their country (which has historically been an oasis for Jewish freedom) officially adopted the Nuremberg Laws, both rationing and race laws have been almost universally resented and whenever possible evaded. When the Nazis pressed for a million soldiers—three per square mile—the pro-Nazi Premier Bardossy resigned and the arch-conservative Teleki took his own life rather than consent.

"Never, Never, Never"

Nevertheless, no one knowing Hungary is surprised that its politicians swallowed the Nazi bait even if they struggled against the hook inside it. As school

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children the whole nation has paraded every week to cry "Never, Never, Never" to the Trianon Treaty—which pared down pre-1918 Hungary to almost a quarter its area and one-third its population. Then as adults they stood before each cinema programme began, while two maps flashed on the screen—"true" (i.e., Pre-Trianon) Hungary versus "dis-membered" (i.e., post-Trianon, present-day) Hungary. For an instalment of the larger map they traded in 1941 what power they had over what they already possessed. You may think such fanaticism tragic, but if you consider the power of propagandised education, you will hardly think it strange.

What is incomprehensible, however, on any surface view of Hungary, is how



"No Magyar believes he is a common man. Look at his dress."

such a perfervid "soil mystique" could ever have arisen. The mountain-ringed Danubian plain, which in its entirety is what the Magyars claim, is settled by a dozen races. And these peoples are so mingled that a map in my possession which colours the villages occupied by each—Magyars 54%, Rumanians 16%, Slovaks 11%, Saxons 10%, etc.—looks like nothing so much as a diseased liver or a paint-shop in explosion. Most towns, indeed, need at least three names, Magyar, Slav, and Saxon—e.g., Kolosvar, Cluj, Klausenburg. Moreover, even Magyar-settled land is only rarely owned by Magyars. Hungary is feudal, almost the last state in Europe to become so and the last to remain so. But the cultured aristocracy who rack-rent its peasants—over 20 per cent illiterate and in places so poor that they buy matches singly—is cosmopolitan by origin, marriage, and interests; not Magyar. Only "the gentry," the one-time squirearchy who now are mostly public servants, has anything material to gain or lose by expansion or contraction of frontiers.

A Tale of Two Continents

The force that keeps Hungary an indigestible stone inside the Slav stomach; that makes enthusiastic Magyars down to their Tartar boots out of the various peoples who through a thousand years have been poured in to repopulate her often desolated plain; and that time and again has turned the officials sent to subdue the nation into its most ardent imperialists—this force is something stronger than any political construction or economic self-interest. It is a legend. I give it for what it is worth.

Two thousand years ago—begins this Tale of Two Continents—the Heart Plain of Europe lay still open and empty of man although the forests around it were filling with people. Came the Romans, and occupied it to the Danube. But the heavily-wooded swamp around the river (even to-day much of the Danube resembles the Lower Waikato of 50 years ago) hid from them the steppe beyond. Came Attila, "Lord of the Volga," and his Hun horsemen on their all-conquering sweep from China to the Channel. And, after him, other conquerors came.

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