

Yet like Hungary itself, its language was replete with gold-mines. In the rich and racy vocabulary of the common people there was both overt material and abundant hints for material hidden under the surface. Kazinczy, instead of taking these hints—instead of coining his new terms and idioms from the language of the common people, as he ought to have done, preferred to coin them according to standards taken from the western languages of Europe. In this he was grievously mistaken. There are unfortunately very few, if any, true dialects of the Hungarian language. This, the greatest drawback to Magyar writers, as the reverse of this deficiency is the greatest advantage to the writers of Germany, France, Italy or England, was rendered very much more harmful by Kazinczy, in that he totally neglected the few dialectic features together with the common household language of the people. In his efforts to enrich the language he thus could not but obtain results of an inferior type. His syntactic moves have not been followed on the whole; and of his new words few have gained general recognition.

He was much more successful in the second of his life-long efforts; in the introduction of the æsthetic ideals of the Greeks into Hungary. We have seen above, that the neglect of the study of Greek literature in Hungary had, in the preceding

periods stunted the growth of Hungarian Literature. Literature, like sculpture, is born of Greek parents ; and none but nations trained in the Hellenic world of ideas, can make a literature proper. In Germany, Lessing, Wieland, Herder and Goethe were so profoundly imbued with Hellenic modes of thought and moulds of expression, that many of their best works have, as has been felicitously remarked, enriched ancient Greek literature. So deep were in Germany, through the works of these men, the furrows of Greek thought, that even writers like Schiller, who did not know Greek, were full of the Greek spirit of beauty and moderation, and amongst its most ardent propagators. It was from these German Hellenes that Kazinczy learned the great and invaluable lesson of Greek idealism, that spiritual atmosphere in which the human intellect feels as different from its ordinary sensations, as does the human body in a river. Kazinczy was the first of the Hungarian writers whose soul had undergone the process of Platonization, to use this clumsy but expressive word for a process, the chief stages of which are an increased familiarity with mental tempers, the greatest exponent of which was Plato. In Kazinczy's wide correspondence with nearly all the literary men of his age ; in his greater and smaller works ; in his personal interviews with the leading men of his time ; he invariably, and with

noble persistency, endeavoured to instil Hellenic ideals of form, of beauty, of serenity. He had clearly seen how much German literature had been benefited by the adoption of those ideals; he sincerely and fervently wanted to confer the same boon on the literature of his own country. This endeavour constitutes his greatness, as its success does his historic importance. His own poems are mediocre; yet he has the merit of being the author of the first sonnets in Hungarian; his forte lies in his prose works, and there chiefly in his translations from the classical writers of Rome, Germany, France and England. It was also his indefatigable activity which gave rise to a wholesome literary controversy about the nature and limits of a radical reform of the Hungarian language as a vehicle of literature. This controversy merits special mention.

Omitting the names of some learned precursors, whose works have not much advanced the philological study of the Hungarian language, it may be stated, that the first to subject that idiom to a careful and systematic study based on researches into its historical development, was Nicolas Révai. In his *Elaboratio Grammatica Hungarica* (1806, 2 vols.), he summed up his previous essays, and placed Hungarian philology on a tolerably sure basis, after the manner subsequently adopted by Jacob Grimm for Germanic

philology. Although he still hankered after the purely imaginary affinity between Magyar and the Semitic languages, he yet succeeded in clearing up many a vital point in Hungarian historic grammar. With regard to the then wanted reform of the language, he taught that that reform ought to proceed on the lines of the laws of language as discovered by a close study of the ancient remains of Hungarian Literature. He was vehemently opposed by Versegby (see page 85), who taught that the reform ought to be guided, not by the bygone forms of Hungarian, but by those actually in force. It is now pretty clear, that while the science of language is sure to be enriched by methods of study such as that of Révai, the art of language is more likely to gain by the advice of Versegby. Kazinczy, who possessed neither Révai's philologic erudition, nor Versegby's powers of philologic analysis, but who adopted principles of reform from both, Kazinczy became the centre of the passionate warfare that now arose for the golden fleece of "Pure Magyar." The Conservative party, whose headquarters were at Debreczen, Somogy, Szeged, and Veszprém, were called orthologues; the adherents of Kazinczy, neologues. Satyric writings were published by both; by the orthologues: "*Búsongó Amor*," 1806, and the still more famous "*Mondolat*," 1813; by the neologues: "*Felelet*," 1816, written by Kölcsey and Szemere;

and chiefly, the prize-essay of Count Joseph Teleki, in 1817. In the end most of the work of the neologues has been accepted by the nation.

## CHAPTER XVI.

THE great campaigns fought by Austria against the French Revolution and Napoleon were in reality the prelude of the subsequent warfare of the Conservative and reactionary classes against the rising Liberalism of modern times. In literature, that mighty duel of night and light was reiterated by the struggle between the romantic and the national schools of poetry. The romantic writers, whether Byron in England, Chateaubriand in France, or Eichendorff in Germany, were all perfect in form, and morbid in subject. They were to poetry what Prince Metternich was to politics, a genius of twilight. So natural was this connection between the French Revolution on the one hand, and national, or sound literature on the other, that they who personally fought in the wars against the Convention and the Directory (1792-1799), as later on against Napoleon (1799-1815), invariably inclined to the romantic or the reactionary school. This will explain the rise of romantic works in Hungary at a time when their

classical and national school had scarcely begun to appear. The first great romantic Hungarian poet is Alexander Kisfaludy (1772-1844). He had fought in the Austrian army in Italy and Germany against the revolutionary armies of France, and so naturally considered the gentry of his country as the true representatives of his nation. In 1801 he published the first part of a series of lyrical poems called "*Himfy Szerelmei*," through which runs the uniting link of luckless love for one and the same maiden. Kisfaludy lived for some time in the country of Petrarch, and the influence of the great singer of hopeless love is clearly visible in the Magyar poet's work. It is written in stanzas of twelve lines, and is full of that shapeless but sweet sentimentality which so characterizes the romantic writers. It is like a landscape in which the most attractive part is the fleeting clouds: mountains, rivers, houses, and persons being all blurred and vague. It is atmospheric poetry, full of sweet words and sounds, as if coming from distant music. In 1807 Kisfaludy published another part of his *Himfy*, this time singing the joys of requited love, as the first did its sorrows. The work was received with great enthusiasm, more especially, of course, by the unmarried population of the country; and Kisfaludy was encouraged to write novels, dramas and ballads in great number. All these works are

meant to form an apotheosis of mediæval times in Hungary; just as the German and French romantic writers revelled in the charms of chateaux and knights and crusades. Some of his ballads are really good, such as *Csobáncz*. His dramas are worthless.



## CHAPTER XVII.

THE romanticism started by Kisfaludy did not, however, retard the other literary movements in Hungary. The Hungarian language is in many ways too closely akin to the classic languages, if not in body, at least in prosody, to have easily forsaken the classic forms which had long been used by writers of this period, for the sake of romanticism. The Hungarian language is in that respect like Hungarian music. Although apparently nothing can be more remote from the strict moderation and stately respectability of classical music than Hungarian music, yet the strictest of the forms of classical music, viz., the fugue, has a curious internal resemblance to Magyar airs, in that the latter easily yield magnificent fugue themes, and preludes to fugues. Likewise the Hungarian language lends itself with surprising felicitousness to the expression of the highest form of classic metrical poetry: the ode.

Daniel Berzsenyi (1776-1826) was the poet who

fully realized the riches of the classical veins in the mines of the Hungarian language, and who gave his country a number of perfect odes written in the metre and in the spirit of the best of antique odes. His patriotic odes, most famous of which is the one beginning "Perishing is now the once strong Magyar" (*Romlásnak indult hajdan erős Magyar*) in alcaic metre); his religious odes, most perfect of which is "God-seeking" (*Fohászkodás*) in alcaic metre); show the chief quality of classical poetry: perfect form wedded to hale and true subjects. He moves on the Alpine roads and in the ravines of the antique arduous metres with natural ease; for the real subjects of his poetry are akin and similar to Alpine sunsets and sunrises, majestic glaciers, and despondent abysses. He is sublime and natural; and amongst modern writers of odes in antique metres only the German Platen, when at his best, can compare with him. His poems were listened to with rapturous attention by the old warriors and politicians of the National Assembly, and read with equal enthusiasm and admiration by the youth of Hungary. From the height whereon he places himself with his lyre, there is no difference of size or age in his listeners. Nor has time abated one tittle of the glory of his best poems. Some of the best critics of his epoch (amongst them Kölcsey)

did not appreciate him adequately. At present we cannot sufficiently wonder at their blindness. We must console ourselves with the thought that poets, like the sun, are, as a rule, not noticed for some time after their appearance on the horizon. In the time of Berzsenyi there died at Vienna (in 1820) a young Hungarian, probably by his own hand, in utter distress; his name was Ladislas Tóth de Ungvárnémet. His mind, living in the regions of the Greek ideals (he even wrote Greek poetry), could not endure the sordid materialism of his surroundings. He left, in Hungarian, a tragedy after the Hellenic model, "*Narcisz.*" Hungary has, by the premature death of Tóth, probably lost her chance of having her Shelley.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

THE enlightened foreigner from France, England or Germany, reading about the allegedly great literary works written by Hungarians, Poles, Czechs or other nationalities who have so far not succeeded in playing first fiddle in the European concert, will probably indulge in a polite doubt as to the exceeding excellence of those works, not one of which has ever been spoken of in the columns of the leading papers or periodicals of London, Paris, Berlin, Rome or Vienna. In the preceding pages we have ventured to mention Pope and Shelley, and a few great German poets in the same breath with great Magyar writers. This may appear preposterous to Englishmen or Germans. Far from reviling them for that, we would rather hasten to add, that in a certain sense they are quite right. Pope's genius is in one most essential point decidedly superior to that of Csokonai (see page 88). Pope's best poems are not exclusively English in taste, subject-matter

or form. They belong to that class of European literature, the best products of which may be relished with equal delight by Spaniards and Danes alike. They are European in character; and so much is this the case with the foremost of those writers, that Shakespeare, for instance, is far better known, by the youth at least of Germany, Austria and Hungary, than by that of England. In the great German writers there is little of that specifically German tone, which people other than Germans cannot very well enjoy. In Lessing there is no trace of the sentimentality and liquoriciousness of his native province; in Schiller there is not a trace of Suabian cunning or lumberdom; and Goethe might just as well have been born at Syracuse under Gelon, or at Athens under Pericles. Is there any trace of Puritanism, this the most specifically English feature of his time, in Shakespeare? The major part of the better writers of Hungary or Poland, on the other hand, have suffered their intense patriotism to make such inroads on the literary character of their works, that the latter frequently lose all their point to readers outside Hungary and Poland.

These reflections are suggested by a consideration of the works of Francis Kölcsey (1790-1838), a really great orator and a good poet. Born in

the county of Bihar, where he spent the best part of his short life, he employed his magnificent powers of oratory chiefly in inculcating in the Hungarians of his time the lesson of patriotism. There can be no doubt that his speeches, his lofty "*Paraenesis*," and some of his critical work are written in that gorgeously laborious style which has made the fame of Bossuet in France and Gibbon in England. His poems breathe a mild melancholy that gives them a sombre tint of peculiar beauty. Yet, on the whole, he never oversteps the narrow limits of Magyar life as then existent; and what appeals to men of all countries and all nations found but a feeble rhetorical echo in his writings. No young Hungarian can read his works without deep emotion. In maturer years, however, he finds that Kölcsey's works belong to those that one gladly remembers to have read once, without desiring to read them again.

The growth of Hungarian Literature from 1772 to 1825 was, compared to that of England from 1570 to 1620; of Germany from 1760 to 1805; or of France from 1630 to 1675, a slow one. Many of the Hungarian writers of that period were endowed with gifts of no common calibre; and some of them, such as Kazinczy, Kisfaludy, Csokonai, Berzsenyi, Kölcsey, can certainly not be denied the distinction of genius. Yet with

all their efforts, individual or collective, they did not quicken the step of literary progress very considerably. This was owing to the fact, that Hungary had as yet no literary centres, such as England possessed in London; France in Paris; and Germany in Berlin, Leipsic or Weimar. Nearly all the poets and other writers so far mentioned lived in small towns scattered over the country, and, from the lack of good communications, were practically isolated from one another. Kazinczy lived in the county of Zemplén; Kölcsey in the county of Bihar; Kisfaludy, Berzsenyi, Ádám Horváth in the cis-Danubian counties. There were, it is true, some literary centres in Pesth; such as the house of the able folk-poet Vitkovics. But they were few, and Pesth was, as yet, not a great capital. Literature needs local concentration of high-strung people. Country life gives the aptitude for poetic work; intense urban life alone ripens that aptitude into creative talent. Virgil at Mantua, or Cicero at Arpinum would have remained sterile provincials. The great mental agitation set in motion by the writers in Magyar above mentioned was given additional fuel by a very large number of Hungarians writing in Latin and French. The ideas of the French and German Rationalism ("*Aufklaerung*") of that time were eagerly seized upon, elaborated

and discussed in over five hundred works and pamphlets treating of Religion, Politics, Law and Philosophy. Hungary was thus during that period (1772-1825), instinct with great intellectual powers; and all that was wanting was to focus them. As long as the political or *the* life of Hungary was crippled by the autocracy of Metternich, that is, down to 1825-1830, that national focus could not be forthcoming. With the revival of the political life in and through the national Diet assembled at Pesth in 1825, the only remaining condition of a quicker and more energetic pulsation of Hungary's literary life was fulfilled. Henceforth Hungary employed the right strategy for the able men of her literary army, and the result was a short but brilliant period of literary productions, many of which attain to the higher and some to the highest degrees of artistic perfection. And inasmuch as the creation of the national focus was the most potent cause of the unprecedented revival of Hungary's literature, we must first treat of that glorious man who was chiefly instrumental in its realization: Count Stephen Széchenyi.



1825-1850.

## CHAPTER XIX.

1825-1850. COUNT STEPHEN SZÉCHENYI, "*the greatest Magyar*," as Kossúth called him, was one of those rare patriots whose enthusiasm is tempered by the most careful respect for facts and practical probabilities, while their love of detail and material work is broadened and elevated by the noble passion of disinterested patriotism. The maxim of his life was, "Hungary has not yet been; she will be" ("*Magyarország nem volt hanem lesz*"). A scion of a magnate family he had, like Mirabeau, derived much light from the study of foreign countries. As most of his contemporaries, he was convinced that Hungary, unless aroused from her political and industrial torpor, could not in her then state claim a place amongst the civilized nations of Europe. He was by no means of a revolutionary disposition against the Habsburgs. On the contrary, he wanted to realize all the vast reforms he contemplated in peace with Austria; for being a sort of enthusiastic Walpole (—the manes of Sir Robert will pardon us that epithet!—)

his activity was directed mainly, at times at least, to the bettering of the material condition of Hungary.

Széchenyi did not, however, neglect the intellectual needs of his country either. When still a young cavalry officer he offered one year's revenue of his estates (£10,000 in value; nominally, £5,000) for the establishment of a national Hungarian Academy of Science, the members of which were to consider the cultivation and development of the Hungarian language as their prime duty. Széchenyi's magnanimous offer was at once responded to by similar offers on the part of three rich magnates (Count George Andrassy, Count George Károlyi, and Baron Abraham Vay), and thus a serious commencement was made with the founding of an intellectual centre in Hungary. The Academy ("*Magyar Tudományos Akadémia*") was formally established in 1830, its first president being Count Joseph Teleki. Among the great number of linguistic, historic, and scientific works, both original and translations, published by the Academy, we may mention the "*Monumenta*," or historic sources of Hungary; several smaller dictionaries for current use, and the great Dictionary of the Hungarian Language, edited by Gregory Czuczor and John Fogarasi (1844-1874); the translation of the best works of foreign authors on History, Philosophy, Law, and Science, including,

amongst others, almost all the standard works of English literature; and a series of original researches into all branches of Science, descriptive, mathematical, physical and chemical. Together with numerous writers of that period, Széchenyi also attempted, and very felicitously too, an internal reform of the Magyar language, to the vocabulary of which he added some needed and now generally accepted terms.

Széchenyi's restless propaganda succeeded in moving even the ultra-conservative and indolent country-gentry; and in the thirties many a nobleman had a residence of his own built in Pesth. The Country began to move into the Town. In 1837, the national Hungarian theatre was opened at Pesth. Numerous newspapers and periodicals were published; the number of press-organs in Magyar, which was five in 1820, rising to ten in 1830, and to twenty-six in 1840. In 1891 there were 645 Magyar newspapers and periodicals in Hungary. The work meted out to the "Academy" being rather of a technical nature, the "Kisfaludy-Society" ("*Kisfaludy-Társaság*") was formed in 1836, with the view of promoting the interests of *belles-lettres* proper in Hungary. Thanks to the patriotic and well-directed activity of that Society, many an unknown but gifted author was enabled to bring his work under the notice of the country. Its prizes were, and are eagerly competed for,

and it has done very much for the great progress of good literature in Hungary. Historical and archæological societies were formed in many parts of the country; and the nation became conscious of the greatness of Hungarian music, which in the wizard hands of Francis Liszt (1811-1887), the greatest of all executive, and one of the most striking of creative musicians, was fast becoming the admiration of Europe. Nor were the schools neglected. Since 1844 the language of instruction in schools was mostly Hungarian. The political reverses of the Hungarians in 1849 caused the introduction of the German language into the schools of Hungary; in 1861, however, the national language was again reinstated in its rights, and now the language of instruction in all the schools and colleges of Hungary is Magyar.

These are some of the most important intellectual reforms which, from 1825 to 1848 completely changed the face of the Hungary of olden times. While previous to 1825, all attempts at reform were restricted to small circles and straggling individuals, and could, therefore, bear no fruit for the nation at large, now the efforts for the renascence of the material and intellectual life of the country were concentrated by the creation of a true capital of social, literary and scientific centres; by the co-operation of great numbers of patriotic and able men; and by the

powerful, nay, in Hungary, all-powerful stimulus imparted to all the energies of the nation through the revival of its ancient parliamentary life. In Hungary, as well as in England, Parliament is the soul of the body-politic. The stagnation of parliamentary life in Hungary from 1813 to 1825 was almost tantamount to the stagnation of all the other intellectual energies of the nation. From 1825 onward, the National Assembly met frequently; the Magyar language was again used in the debates, and many reforms that had proved unrealizable in the hands of private reformers, were carried out by the power of the nation assembled in Parliament. The constant opposition offered to all reforms in Hungary, at the hands of the Vienna government, only acted as a further stimulus to the Hungarians; and within the five-and-twenty years of the present period, Hungary advanced by leaps and bounds, both in its politic and literary development.

## CHAPTER XX.

THE *rôle* of Kazinczy as mentor and model for the younger generation of his time was now allotted to a very gifted poet, Charles Kisfaludy, brother of Alexander (see page 101). He was born in 1788, and like his brother, became a soldier in the Austrian army. His proud father, on learning that he had, in 1811, thrown up his military career, disowned him; and Charles had to rough it in wild wanderings over Europe amidst great privations. Yet his mind, singularly widened by the view and study of European civilization, was thereby so strengthened and developed, that on his return to his country (1817), he contrived to rise from abject poverty to comparative comfort by his own literary exertions. His dramas, some of which he wrote in the course of a few days, were at once so intensely relished by the public, that Kisfaludy, who produced with equal ease poetic works of lyric or epic character, quickly became the centre of the literary life of Hungary. The "*Aurora*," a literary periodical founded by

him in 1822, was enriched by the contributions of the foremost writers, mostly his followers; and he himself was the rallying personality for the new literary movement. Alas! his body, less elastic than his mind, could never overcome the effects of his wanderings, and he died of consumption in 1830.

In Kisfaludy the influence of the literary ideals of the French and Germans is easily traceable. Like his models he was steeped in romanticism and worship of the distant past. Yet he was saved from the sickliness and namby-pambiness of many a German or French romantic poet by his strong sense of humour. In his dramas ("*Stibor Vaida*," "*Irén*," etc.) he frequently manifests strong dramatic vitality. It is in his comedies and gay stories, that he excels. His humour is broad, subtle, sympathetic and well worded. In his tragedies he did not succeed in creating a type, this, one of the safest criteria of a poet's genius. In his comedies ("*Csalódások*" ["Disappointments"]; "*Kérők*" ["The Wooers"]; "*Leányörzö*" ["Girl's Guard"], etc.) on the other hand, he has given types of undying vitality; such as "*Mokány*," the rough, humorous and honest young country squire. If we consider the fact here so frequently alluded to, that social life in Hungary was up to the thirties of this century exclusively life among the county-families in the country, or in

small towns; if, moreover, we remember that such life on a small scale, where each person stands out in bold relief and unencumbered by the numerous social mediocrities of large towns, is the proper foster-earth of rich personalities: it will be easy to see, that social life in Hungary in Kisfaludy's youth was bristling with delightfully original types of men and women. They only waited for the hand of the poet to spring into their frames, and form valuable pictures. Country-life and small towns in Hungary, to the present day, are full of the most delightful types, both men and women; and the reputation of a Dickens might have been acquired by him who would have told the "adventures" and freaks of, for instance, the quaint, many-tongued sires of the county of Sáros. Kisfaludy, with the true poet's eye *saw* those types, and put them bodily on his canvas. They talk on his pages that very language, full of savoury adjectives and verbal somersaults, that they used when meeting at the halls of their friends, at the "Casino" of the place or at the table in front of the Swiss *Confiserie*, in the sleepy streets of their county capital. In his novels, "*Tollagi János*" [a proper name]; "*Sulyosdi Simon*" [a proper name], etc., Kisfaludy has recorded many a precious feature of the life of these sturdy, amiable, enthusiastic, shrewd and simple country-gentry, in the midst of whom



moved the pathetic and lofty young girl; the coquettish and charming young wife (or "little heaven," "*mennyecske*," as the Hungarian word has it); the quaint old maid, and the still quainter old bachelor. Here Kisfaludy is at his best; and in showing his fellow-writers some of the wealth to be found in their own country, he did Hungarian Literature and Hungarian nationality an immense service. In some of his lyrical poems, and especially in his truly majestic ode to the memory of the disaster of Mohács (1526), written in dystichs, Kisfaludy is frequently more than clever; in that ode he soars to the sublime. His "*Eprészleány*" ("Girl Gleaning Strawberries") is a charming idyll.

## CHAPTER XXI.

THE work of Kisfaludy was great. He charmed his readers, and thus awakened an interest in Hungarian Literature in circles that had hitherto been callous to the intellectual revival of their country. His vocation, however, was limited. The Hungarians, by nature grave and given to ponderous sentiments, needed, for a full awakening of their literary life, more than the perfume of flowers. The rhythmic thunder of the war-clarion; the majesty of the organ was needed. And the right man came. The man, in whose sublime poems was heard the turmoil of the old glorious wars, the symphony of love and patriotism, in tones of unprecedented beauty. That man was Michael Vörösmarty (1800-1855). His life was devoted entirely to the pursuit of literature, and in his soul there was only one grand thought: to become Hungary's troubadour, to kindle the holy light of patriotism on the altar, and with the aid of the muses. In this he was successful beyond all his predecessors. His were

some of the rarest qualities, the union of which goes to make the great poet. In beauty and truly Magyar rhythm of language he was and largely still is unsurpassed. His diction is, like his country, full of the majesty of vast mountains, and the loveliness of flower-clad meadows sloping down to melodious rivers. Without being a reckless innovator of words, his works read at the first appearance as if written in a new language. As when the student of Hellenic antiquity, after years spent with engravings of old Greek art, comes for the first time to see one of the still extant remains of that art itself: so felt the contemporaries of Vörösmarty when the glorious hexameters of his epic, "*Zalán futása*," first struck their ears. There was at last, not only this or that instrument of the orchestra of Hungarian language; there was heard, not only the wails of the 'cello of Kölcsey; the musical cascades of the clarinet of Charles Kisfaludy; the wafting chords of the harp of Berzsenyi; or the gossamer oboe of Csokonai: there was heard the unison and harmonious struggle of all the instruments of the great idiom. Like the composers of the immortal symphonies, Vörösmarty wielded the resources of the Magyar language, intensifying the effect of each instrument by the parallel or counter-quires of the other instruments. In his love-songs you hear

not only the notes of the melody, but also, as in the songs of his Austrian contemporary, Schubert, the undercurrents of the melody in the accompaniment. The wealth of poetic figures in Vörösmarty is surprising; yet a chaste moderation tempers all undue exuberance. He is powerful, not violent; imposing, not fierce. He writes mostly Largos; but there are very few *longeurs* in them. The quick pulsation of the drama does not suit him; the epic and ode are his favourite forms. For, in him is much of the priest, of the seer of a nation. In the depth of his reticent heart he feels the whole life of his nation, and smarts unspeakably from its then degradation. Too proud to indulge in constant moanings, he is yet in an agony of rage and indignation at the oppression of his people. But this holy anger goes forth from him sculptured in songs, swelling with abiding life of beauty and power.

Vörösmarty's poetic vocation was, if not aroused, yet, undoubtedly, guided into the right direction by an epic of one Alexander Székely, a Unitarian preacher, entitled "The Szekler in Transylvania" ("*A Székelyek Erdélyországban*"), in which a not infelicitous attempt was made to work into one national song the ancient Magyar legends and mythology. An epic is the song of a nation whose critical dangers are not yet over. It may be said, without exaggeration, that heroic Wolfe

in driving the French out of Canada (1759), drove out the last chance of the Americans for anything like a great national epic. In gaining their independence a few years after Wolfe's success, the Americans also obtained perfect security. There was no serious enemy left to jeopardize their existence. The Indians could and did annoy them much; they could not seriously call their very existence in question. Hence the Indian tales of Fenimore Cooper are the only epics of the Americans. In Hungary matters stood quite differently. There the very existence of the nation was doubtful. A catastrophe might occur at any time. And in the terrible anguish of that "gigantic death" ("*nagyszerű halál*"), of which Vörösmarty sings in his "*Szózat*" (national hymn), the people of Hungary needed more than a drama or an ode can give. It needed a national poem of large dimensions in which the glories of the past were held up to the people as an incitement to the conquest of the trophies of the future; in which the powers of the Divine were shown to have a personal interest in the destinies of the nation; and in which the sacred language of thirty generations of patriots glows in all the victorious beauty of perfection. When in 1748 Klopstock published his great epic, the "*Messias*," he too desired to do his country a patriotic

service. His aim was, however, at once larger and smaller than that of Vörösmarty. He meant chiefly to weld for the Germans the weapon of a better language. Beyond this he meant his epic for any nation whatever, its subject-matter being of universal acceptance amongst Christian nations. Not so Vörösmarty. He meant to write a Messianic epic, in which the Messiah was the Hungarian nation itself. He wanted to raise up a particular nation, his nation, to the consciousness of its force, of its vocation. And thus, while the intellectual scope of his poem was much more limited than that of either Milton or Klopstock, the intensity of its purport far exceeded both.

The name of the epic was, "The Flight of Zalán" ("*Zalán futása*"). It appeared in 1825, or in the year when the national Parliament reassembled after twelve long years' adjournment, and when the nation, at any rate, many of the best men of the nation, were in feverish expectancy of the rise of New Hungary. Its subject is taken from the history of Árpád the Conqueror, and centres in the Battle of Alpár, in which Árpád defeats his most fearful enemy, Zalán, one of the Bulgarian rulers of the territory between the Danube and the Tisza (Theiss) rivers. There are in the poem three parallel streams of epic deeds, which, like the three

choruses of string, reed and brass instruments in an orchestra, join in one powerful symphony. Árpád, the great duke and father of his people, fights Zalán, and especially his herculean general Viddin. Ete, the young and romantic Magyar knight fights Csorna, the diabolic Bulgarian hero; and in the heavens "*Hadur*" ("God of the war," a name introduced by Székely), the national god of the Magyars, fights and conquers "*Ármány*," the arch-fiend. The element of love is represented by Ete, who loves Hajna, the beautiful daughter of an old Hungarian hero. She is also courted by a divine charmer, whose temptations, however, she rejects, and from whom she receives an enchanted horse. A large portion of the epic is taken up with the description of single combats between the heroes. In the end, the Hungarians are (as in reality they were) victorious, and Zalán flees from his country.

There is undoubtedly much Ossianic misty glamour in Vörösmarty's great epic; and the figures of its leading heroes do not stand out with all the desirable plasticity from among the multitude of minor heroes and mythologic divinities. Yet Ete and Hajna are suffused with all the charms of youth, love and heroism; and in *Hadúr* and *Ármány* two powerful mythological types are placed before us. Árpád himself

answers very well the chief purpose of the poem, in that he is rather the incarnation of a nation strong, noble, God-fearing and conquering, than the representative of any special personality. Perhaps the least endowed figure of the poem is Zalán, in whom the poet might have represented, in contrast to Árpád, the various enemies endangering Hungary's existence, and of whom he only made a proud and despairing prince. Yet, after allowing for these shortcomings—very natural in a work written in eleven months—“*Zalán futása*” is a truly great epic. The splendour of its language, in regard to which it is fully the equal of “*Paradise Lost*,” fell upon its first readers with the spell of the Fata Morgana of the Hungarian *pusztas* or prairies, on the lonely traveller. There was one general feeling: “such language had not yet risen from any Hungarian lyre!” (“*igy még nem zenge magyar lant!*”). A nation whose past could inspire such epic music, was a nation of imposing resourcefulness. Only great nations, after conquering great dangers, can produce great epics. A great epic is not alone a literary event; as such it would redound mostly to the glory of the author. It is a national event, and redounds chiefly to the glory of the nation. It is the symptom and warrant of national greatness; of that noble enthusiasm—without which, numerous



factories and railways can be built indeed, but no fabric of a national commonwealth holding its own amidst roaring seas of danger and adversity. Vörösmarty's epic poured into the Hungarians that Belief and Confidence, that Eternality of Hope, which alone steels nations against fate. Széchenyi had connected Buda, the capital of the past, with Pesth, the capital of modern Hungary, by means of a gigantic suspension bridge. Vörösmarty now connected Hungary's past with her future by the rainbow of his immortal epic.

In addition to "The Flight of Zalán," Vörösmarty enriched Hungarian Literature with several other smaller epics, such as "*Széplak*," "*Cserhalom*," and the exquisite "The Two Neighbouring Castles" ("*Két szomszéd vár*"). After 1831 he ceased writing epics. He had a real passion for dramatic poetry, and although in "*Csongor és Tünde*" alone he contrived to write a drama of superior finish, yet he continually tried his hand at that form of poetry ("*Vérnász*") ("The Sanguinary Wedding"); "*Marótbán*" (Banus Marót); "*Áldozat*" (The Sacrifice), etc. His lyrical poetry, on the other hand, contains priceless gems. Adorning, as he did, even the smallest of his lyrical poems with the unrivalled splendour of his diction; he reaches in some of them, and first of all in the majestic "National Hymn" ("*Szózat*, 1837), the

highest level of poetic *élan*. In these select poems, while still singing nothing but the hopes and glories of his nation, he becomes so European in tone and chaste beauty of form, that his work will lose little of its perfection by fair translations into other European languages. In them there is felt the breath of that civilization of Greater Hellas, or Europe, which was originally that of Hellas proper. Nor does his lyric muse move in grave and solemn moods alone. In his famous "Song of Fót" ("*Fóti dal*"), he has left the wine-drinking community of the world a model song in praise of the noble child of Bacchus. He likewise succeeded in writing poetic apotheoses of some of the great Hungarians of his time, such as Liszt, the great musician, and in the composition of small narrative poems, which prove him to have been endowed with a keen sense of humour ("*Mák Bandi*;" "*Laboda*;" "*Petike*;" "*Gábor deák*"). His great activity as a creative poet did not prevent him from writing a considerable number of articles for literary periodicals, such as the "*Tudományos Gyűjtemény*," "*Kritikai Lapok*" (edited by Bajza), and for the new "*Aurora*," and the "*Athenæum*." He was also one of the translators of the "Thousand and One Nights," and of some of Shakespeare's plays.

## CHAPTER XXII.

THE national and literary current of which Vörösmarty was the chief exponent brought several other great epic works to the surface. Andreas Horvát de Pázmánd (1778-1839) was working for many years at a national epic in twelve long cantos, singing the history of Árpád the conqueror. In 1831, at last, he published the huge poem which, however, was distanced and soon silenced by the masterwork of Vörösmarty. It certainly helped both to set off "The Flight of Zalán" still more strongly, and also to widen the circle of old Magyar mythology.

An epic poet of far superior merit was Gregory Czuczor (1800-1866). Had he not been a monk, and so lost much of the vivifying contact of civil life, he might have soared very high. It must be, however, added that his conflict both with poverty and with the Austrian Government, did make up largely for the lack of experiences of romantic, conjugal and family conflicts. His was a vigorous,

systematic and finely discerning mind. To the epic he felt attracted not only by the general literary tone of his time, but by his personal bent for popular or rather folk-poetry. The *naïveté* of the latter, which forms its distinctive feature, is also one of the chief elements of the epic. Among Czuczor's epics, "*Botond*," in four cantos, is the best. It tells part of the life of that famous Hungarian hero of the time of the conquest. Botond had brought home from his Byzantine campaigns a charming Greek girl, Polydora. One of the Magyar heroes, Bödölény, who also loves Polydora, takes her secretly back to Constantinople. Now Botond again invades the Greek Empire, and with his huge war-club breaks a hole in the gate of the capital. In the end he gets back Polydora. This simple plot is enlivened with recitals not only of military and heroic exploits, but also of touching love-episodes. The contrast between burly, brave Botond and the refined Greek maid, the episodes in which Szende, the page occurs, and the beautifully rolling hexameters lend a peculiar charm to this epic. Perhaps now, after the realization of most of the ardent political hopes of Czuczor's age, his epic will be considered even as much better than at the time of its appearance when it had to compete with the more fiery epic-muse of Vörösmarty. Of Czuczor's linguistic

works we have already made mention (see page 112).

A contemporary of Czuczor, John Garay (1812-1853), although not a poet of great distinction, must be here mentioned, on account of the popularity of his innumerable ballads and similar epic poetry, covering almost every one of the memorable events of Hungarian history. Rather a rhetor than a poet, he wrote his ballads, of which "*Kont*" (relating to the martyr-death of thirty Hungarian patriots at the hands of Emperor Sigismund), is the best known, in an easy-flowing popular style. He trusted rather to the attractiveness of the story itself than to his own poetic genius. When well recited, many of his ballads are still very effective.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

DESPITE the very great advance made in the development of their literature up to 1830, the Hungarians were still wanting in one of the necessary elements of the growth of truly good works. Honest, just and well-informed criticism was wanting. Kazinczy, it is true, had in his extensive correspondence paid very careful attention to the critical examination of the prosody and language of his friends and pupils. Such external criticism, however, did not suffice. In a country, such as Hungary, where Greek literature was then known only to exceedingly few writers, the canons of criticism were easily neglected. Moreover, literature being still considered more as a patriotic than a literary function, poets did not, as a rule, tolerate even mild criticism. Yet without such criticism, Hungarian Literature was likely to deteriorate. Even men of genius are the better for good criticism. Yet they are the exception ; and to the vast number of writers with talent rather than genius, criticism was, and

always has been, the mentor whom they could not afford to miss. It has been one of the great advantages of French literature that its creative writers have nearly always been watched by great critical writers. From Boileau and Diderot, to Sainte-Beuve, the French have always had men of piercing and tasteful criticism, who controlled the works of the purely spontaneous genius. Nor can the literature of Germany congratulate itself on a more auspicious circumstance than the fact of Lessing's incomparable activity as a critic at the very outset of the classical period. It is with regard to this historic value of sound literary criticism, that we must appreciate the work of the Hungarian writer forming the subject of the present chapter.

Joseph Bajza (1804-1858) had many of the qualities of a great critic. He was courageous, especially in that courage which is perhaps the rarest, the courage defying current opinions; he was learned; he possessed a very keen sense of linguistic niceties and poetic forms; and, last not least, he was no mean poet himself. Already in 1830 he gave signal proof not only of his pure patriotism, but also of his penetrating knowledge of the true needs of the then Hungarian Literature, by fiercely attacking a plan, broached by a Hungarian publisher, to prepare a Hungarian Encyclopædia (or "Conversations-

Lexicon," as, in imitation of the well-known German publication, it was called) on lines, as Bajza proved, unpatriotic, because unsuited to the character and stage of Magyar literature of that time. This was the "Conversations-Lexicon Quarrel." In the same year, Bajza started his critical paper ("*Kritikai Lapok*"), which was later on (1837) followed by his "*Athenæum*," and its appendix "*Figyelmező*." In these periodicals he discoursed with great verve and knowledge on the theories of various poetic forms; and carefully criticised the works of his contemporaries. His chief contributors were Vörösmarty and Toldy (then still Schedel), the former a great poet, the latter (see p. 254) a great scholar. The authority of Bajza made itself felt very soon; and the numerous polemics occasioned by his articles only served to aggrandize his position as a critic. Already in his essays on the epigram, the novel, the drama, etc., Bajza had proved himself a constructive as against a purely negative critic. In that capacity probably his chief merit is his elaboration of the "theory" of the folk-poem. In Hungary, with her numerous peasantry, there is an inexhaustible wealth of poems composed by unknown people, exclusively peasants, shepherds, and similar inglorious poets. These poems, invariably meant to be adapted to songs, are wafted over the country like the



mild breezes of spring, and like them, no one knows their origin. In previous times, the rococo taste of enlightened pedants had contemptuously ignored these blossoms of the wild *puszta* (prairie). Since Csokonai they were held in greater esteem; but it was Bajza who, by framing them in the time-honoured formulæ of classical æsthetics, raised them to a literary status. Since Bajza, the "*népdal*," or folk-song was not only a matter of national delight or pride, but also of serious study.

To Bajza's circle belonged the poets Alexander Vachott (1818-1861); Frederick Kerényi (1822-1852), who died in America; Julius Sárosy (1816-1861), the author of several stirring revolutionary poems; Andreas Pap; Emeric Nagy; Sigismund Beöthy, etc.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

THE rapid growth of Hungarian Literature since 1825, shows chiefly in works of poetry proper; that is, in verse. Hungarian prose had in the first ten years of this period received no development similar to that of Hungarian verse. Yet many a writer had tried his hand at the creation of Hungarian literary prose. The reason of this belated advance of Hungarian prose was owing mainly to the late introduction of the Magyar language into the schools. Not before a language has hewn its way through the thickets of philosophy, the subtleties of distinctions in physics and chemistry, or the awkward bulkiness of historical facts, will it be supple and flexible enough to do efficient service for the innumerable needs of prose. Without a prose ready for all the turns and twists of serious thought, great historical or philosophical works are almost impossible. The difficulty was overcome in Hungary by applying prose first to novels, and then to History or Philosophy. Novels and romances, taking as they do the place of the

epics in olden times, have also a national or more than literary importance. And we find that nations without great epics are also, as a rule, without great novels of their own. The astounding progress made in Hungary in epic literature proper bade fair to inaugurate the forthcoming of a novelistic literature. Vörösmarty and Czuczor were soon to have their followers in prose—the novelists. The frequency of rich types in Hungarian society could not but favour that branch of literature. In fact, the greatest difficulty for Hungarian novelists then, and to a large extent even now, was not to discover and work out a good subject, but to hunt up a sufficient number of readers. In the thirties and forties of this century, most of the cultivated individuals in Hungary were so familiar with German and even with French, that they could and did easily gratify their novelistic appetites with the innumerable products from the pens of German and French novelists. People will seldom relish or crave for lyric or epic poems of nations other than their own. They will ordinarily prefer home-made verse. With novels it is quite different. There is scarcely any exaggeration in stating that Lord Lytton's novels have been read more extensively in Germany and Austria-Hungary than in England. The same applies respectively to George Sand, the French, and Mme. Flygare—Carlén, the Swedish novelist. Hungarian

novelists had, therefore, to contend against formidable competition from abroad. But there was another and equally grave difficulty to conquer. The public in all countries has a fatal tendency to take up one author as the "standard" author in a given department of literature, and to give all other authors in the same field the cold shoulder. The less intense the interest which the public takes in that department, the more it will be inclined to believe in the "standard" man. In Hungary, that evil tendency has wrought great injury to novelists. At once a few of them became the "standard" novelists. Nobody wanted to hear of any other. By this means the rise of other, perhaps greater novelists, was retarded, if not altogether foreclosed; and the "standard" man, eagerly seizing on the great favour bestowed upon him, poured forth scores of novels, irrespective of the higher demands of Art. The consequence was that he deteriorated. For one good novel he gave ten bad ones. Having a sort of literary monopoly, he did not heed adverse criticism. The public, on the other hand, did not care to learn of a new novelist, and, as actually happened in Hungary, almost entirely neglected a real genius for no other reason than that mental laziness, which in countries with less abundant literature is perhaps one of the most baneful of obstacles to the success of a writer.

The preceding remarks appear to be necessary

for a right appreciation of Hungarian novels. Foreign readers, and perhaps more especially the English, are apt to admire in Hungarian novels such qualities as strike them as new and "weird," because German, French, or English novelists do not excel in them. Thus foreign readers will easily be impressed, and in many cases unduly so, by the great picturesqueness of Hungarian novelists. This quality, commendable though it no doubt is, will induce many a foreign critic to overrate the value of this or that Hungarian novel. In Hungary, picturesque turns of phrases are of the very commonest. They do not strike a Hungarian critic as being particularly meritorious. Hence the reader of the present work must not be astonished at some of the subsequent severe judgments passed on Hungarian novelistic celebrities. Far from trying to deter English or French readers from the reading of such novels as they will find criticised adversely, we would rather advise them to enjoy those novels without further regard to the views of the writer. We have in so criticising of necessity placed ourselves on a basis rather Magyar than European, and we are fully aware of the marked difference in taste to be found in the various nations of Europe. If the novelists and poets of one nation were to be judged by the taste of another, Thackeray could hardly be regarded as a great novelist, and Tennyson scarcely as a great

poet. Yet both are in England recognized as two of the best writers in English literature.

Of the great novelists of Hungary, four stand out as peculiarly excellent. Their names are Nicolas Jósika; Joseph Eötvös; Sigismund Kemény; and Maurus Jókai. The first three belong to the class of Magnates, being Barons; the last is a commoner by birth. It is rather curious, that the Magnates, who have in the present century given no poet of the first order to Hungary, should in the field of Hungarian novel writing have furnished three writers of the first rank, of whom one, Baron Kemény, has done work not unworthy of the greatest novel-writer of the century.

The first of the four to attract general attention in Hungary was Baron Joseph Jósika. He was born in 1794 at Torda, in Transylvania. Having spent many years in the military service of Austria, and in travels abroad, he retired in 1818 and withdrew to Transylvania, where he pursued historic and literary studies, relating chiefly to his own province. Transylvania harbours many of the most glorious traditions of Hungarian history. For generations, especially in the seventeenth century, it was practically the only home of Magyardom. There is no lack of romantic, picturesque, or startling facts in the public or social life of that country; and Jósika, whose heart had, through his first luckless marriage, learned the depths of sorrow, as

through his second wife he learned the bliss of true love, Jósika was in a position to do full justice to the wealth of picturesque characters and scenery in Transylvania's past. His first novel, "*Abafi*," was published in 1836, and at once received general applause on the part of the critics, and, what was still more important, at the hands of the public. Its subject is taken from the troubled times of Sigismund Bátori, when Turks, Austrians and Magyars, were fighting and intriguing for the possession of Transylvania, in the last two decades of the sixteenth century. Bátori's mighty and tainted personality, with all his cruelty, heroism, astuteness and audacity, is, together with that of the Turkish conquerors, pashas, and court people, the personal background to the hero of the novel, Oliver Abafi, who rises from conduct dissipated and lawless, to the heights of noble self-sacrifice. The story is told with great power of description and impersonation. The reader cannot fail to feel as if quite at home in that agitated corner of Europe, where some of the historic agencies met in deadly conflict, and where men and women breathed much of that grand air of great events, which colours them in tints unknown to the people of less eventful times. The novel is intensely interesting and will convey a more life-like picture of its period than many a dull historic volume.

Equal to, and if possible, even more fascinating,

is Jósika's novel, "The Bohemians in Hungary" ("*A csehek Magyarországon*"). This novel goes back to older times still. It pictures the state of Hungary in the middle of the fifteenth century, when the Bohemian (Czech) Hussites were invading Hungary. Of all the innumerable sects and heresies from the end of the twelfth century to the rise of Protestantism, the Hussites were no doubt the most powerful. From the depths of the forests ranging round the river Main, to the mountains encircling Hungary and Transylvania, these heroic and fanatic warriors spread the terror of their name. But for some grave political mistakes and unforeseen reverses of Vitovt, one of the greatest of the historic Slavs (flourished 1380 to 1430), who wanted to found a Slav empire, reaching from the western confines of Bohemia, to the walls of holy Moscow, the Slavs, on the basis of Hussitism, and under leaders like Ziska, and the Procops, might have for ever reduced the historic *rôle* of Germany to that of a small power. Theirs would then have been a great empire, strongly unified in language, creed and traditions. No Austria would have been possible; and Hungary would have probably been submerged in the Slav flood. It is the story of the lives of some of these wild and terrible Czechs in the north and north-west of Hungary which forms the subject of the powerful novel of Jósika. The castles of the Czech leaders were real fortresses of



Slavdom, and the population of those parts of Hungary being largely Slav to the present day, the danger for Hungary was very great. Fortunately for the independence of the Magyars, their young king Matthew Corvinus, son of John Hunyadi, was a match for the Bohemians. One by one he destroyed their castles, liberating thousands of prisoners, and ridding the country of the Slav invasion. His illustrious figure shines in Jósika's novel like the youthful emblem of that historic vitality which has kept Hungary in a ruling position over Slav and Germanic tribes these last thousand years. The picturesqueness of Jósika's novel is extraordinary. Male and female characters of intense fascination move in the castles, battlefields, dungeons and mountain-paths described by the novelist. Komoróczy, the knight and robber; the glorious king and his romantic love; Elemér, the hero, called "the Eagle"; the charming widow, who defies with a dimpled smile the most ruthless of amorous men; Jews, at once grand in suffering and commonplace in their greed; all these and many more scenes and portraits reconstruct that memorable time when the Renaissance was rising over the dying gloom of the Middle Ages.

It is impossible to tell here, even very briefly, the plots and characters of the very numerous novels written by Jósika both in Hungary and at

Dresden, whither he retired after escaping the Austrians, who had sentenced him to death as one of the prominent members of the Hungarian "rebels." All these novels are historic in subject, and even quote, sometimes, chapter and verse from the chronicles on which they are based. The most famous are "*Esther*;" "*Francis Rákóczy II.*," the hero of which is the most popular of all Hungarian princes who ever revolted from the Habsburgs; "A Hungarian Family during the Revolution" ("*Egy magyar család a forradalom alatt*"); "The Last Báthory" ("*Az utolsó Báthory*"). Jósika is easily compared to and measured by Walter Scott. Yet there is in the very tendencies of their works a marked difference. Scott, in writing his novels, was prompted more by his literary tastes and proclivities than by any consideration of politic aims. Both Scotland and England were during his lifetime (1771-1832) at the height of their triumphal career. His novels were romantic work pure and simple. England being at the head of the powers combating the French Revolution, her literary geniuses, too, followed lines opposed to modern Liberalism; in other words, they became romantic. Hungary, on the other hand, was, during the lifetime of Jósika, an oppressed country, and after a short period of glory during her war of independence, she vegetated for over ten years in a torpor caused by a fiercely reactionary government. Into

Jósika's novels, therefore, there necessarily entered a political element, which coloured his work with a tint unknown to the great Scotchman's tales. And this, together with the circumstance of his becoming rapidly a "standard" novelist, explains Jósika's literary eminence and also his literary failings. In his attempt to use the story of Hungary's past as a means of reviving her present, he naturally lost sight of some of the purely literary laws of novel-writing. His characters being already given by history, he neglected to elaborate their psychology. Events happen rather unto or by them, than through them. The inner machinery of motives is sometimes clumsy or too flimsy. Being much in demand as a "standard" novelist, he wrote much; too much. Yet with all these occasional shortcomings, Jósika is one of the most splendid novelists of the picturesque class. Few Hungarian books recording Hungary's past will give the foreign reader a more pleasing and, at the same time, instructive picture of the romantic days of that great country. The professorial critic, reposing on the tattered laurels of his victims, if not on his own, will find much to rebuke in Jósika. The youth of Hungary and the unprejudiced foreigner will always read him with delight.

## CHAPTER XXV.

THE second great novelist in that period was Eötvös. Born in 1813, he received a careful education, and after extensive travels in western Europe, embraced the judicial career for a time. When still a young man, at the age of six-and-twenty, he published his first great novel, "The Carthusian" ("*A Karthauzi*," 1839-40). This remarkable work had an immense effect. It was read with equal delight in the palaces of the magnates, and in the closets of the middle-class people. It charmed the young and moved the old. It seemed to express the very innermost cravings and mental propensities of the then Hungarian public. More than that. It expressed a state of feeling then almost universal on the continent of Europe. Like Goethe's "*Werther*," it lent expression to what lay dormant and unexpressed in the hearts of millions of Europeans. The sultry atmosphere then weighing on continental Europe had engendered a morbid melancholy in many a high-strung man and woman.

Life seemed to be full of unsolved and unsolvable problems; full of forces disruptive and disintegrating, causing unease uncertainty and distress. All the nobler efforts of men in building up their private or public fortunes appeared to be blighted and marred by the demoniac perverseness of the political and social powers of the time. A brooding meditateness seized people, and fresh and vigorous deeds being impossible, pale and despondent reflections embroiled men in a dumb struggle against destiny. Such was the mental temper of a very large class of men and women in France, Germany, Austria, Hungary and Italy. Eötvös himself had, from early youth, been given to that morbid meditateness and self-destructive sensitiveness of the age; and the sorrowful condition of his country only increased his pathetic melancholy. Hungarian young men and women, then and now, are naturally very much more pathetic and grave than the youth of any other country. They have neither the virile alacrity of the British youth so agreeably manifested in the games and muscular amusements of young England; nor the precocious polish and gaiety of French youths. Theirs is a heavy mood, similar to that of the *Largos* of Hungarian music, but followed by no *Friss* or *Vivace*. To souls tuned in such minor keys, the "*Karthauzi*" came as the very revelation of their deepest secrets. Hitherto

the epics and novels written in Hungary had been retrospective work. They narrated the woes and joys, the troubles and glories of past ages. In Eötvös' novel there was, practically for the first time, a work of introspective *actualité*; a work appealing to the reader himself, and not only to his historic imagination. The queries tormenting the young men and women of that age were here subjected to an analysis full of psychological inquisitiveness, enveloped in the gloaming of poetic descriptions of Nature. The plot of the novel is of the simplest. Gustavus, a French nobleman, in whose agitated soul are accumulated all the tempest-laden clouds of his age, seeks in vain to find peace and consolation in Love, Pleasure and Ambition. Julia, his first love, deserts him for an unworthy "other one;" Betti, his second love, he rejects himself. And so, tossed from one rock of discord to the other, he finally enters the order of the Carthusians, and there, amidst steady work and in firm faith, finds the only solution that can await characters like his: Death. Goethe, with the terrible serenity of judgment so peculiar to him, once remarked, that there are, as he called them, "problematic characters, who can do justice to no situation in which they may be placed." Such a character is Gustavus. But such was also the general and typical character of his time; and

hence the immense effect of the novel. Even the chief and serious deficiency of the novel, being as it was, the deficiency of numerous Hungarian minds of that time, only helped to increase its popularity. Eötvös could never quite overcome the inner contrast between his Franco-German education and the Magyar character of his works. Of all the great Hungarian writers, his language is the least Magyar in form and savour. The European and the Magyar were constantly battling in him and frequently to the detriment of the latter. His was not that power of blending European and national culture into a new and harmonious composition. That power is distinctively the characteristics of the classical writers of nations. It belongs only to the highest form of genius. But the reading public of the "*Karthaúzi*" was largely recruited from amongst people in whom that conflict between western and Magyar culture had likewise not been brought to a harmonious issue. They thus found in the great novel that very failing of their own class, without which, according to Grillparzer's profound remark, success is hardly obtainable in any profession.

In 1845, Eötvös published another great novel: "The Village Notary" ("*A falu jegyzője*"). It was meant to be a scathing satire on the corruption, backwardness and general administrative

misery of public county life in Hungary. Eötvös, whose conceptions of the state and its organs were formed largely after the models of German, Austrian and French organizations, was deeply convinced of the utter insufficiency of that local selfgovernment, which in Hungary had nearly always been one of greater independence than that even of England. In Hungary all the leading and influential officials in the counties were elective, and from among the noble class of the county only. Being more than underpaid, they frequently abused their power, and contrived to secure a relatively large income by means of exactions and terrorizations of all kinds. The typical figure of these squires was the *szolgabíró*, or under-sheriff, as he may be termed, if with inaccuracy, who presided over nearly all the public affairs of one of the districts into which counties are divided. His administration was frequently carried on pasha fashion indeed; and the poorer classes were much at his mercy. Eötvös, who thought that the strongly centralized and systematized organization of French or German local governments was undoubtedly much superior to the system obtaining in Hungary, published his novel with the intention of bringing about a change in public opinion, and so finally a change in the county-system itself. To the immense benefits accruing to the Hungarians as a



nation through the very system of local self-government which Eötvös so cruelly exposed, he was insensible. That county-life, in spite of all its crying abuses, was the only and indispensable preliminary schooling for the functions of government in council or parliament; that these rough and uncultured county-gentry in Hungary, as well as their brethren in England, were far better fitted for some of the most important tasks of government and politics than the most methodic and punctual official in French or German local offices, to all that Eötvös paid no serious attention. His warm-hearted love of Equality and Right made him boil over at the sight of many an injustice—at the hands of men whose inferiority in point of knowledge and western culture rendered them easy objects of contempt to one who gauged all political greatness by the standard of France or Germany. Eötvös, the politician, entertained of course the same ideas about the value of the old Hungarian county-system, as did Eötvös the novelist. He was a “centralist”; and the number of his followers has been very great to the present day. They still maintain that even the present remnants of the old county-system in Hungary are very injurious to the Magyar state; and that nothing short of a total overhauling, or—to talk plainly—abolition of that system, and the introduction of French centralization in its lieu can save the

kingdom of St. Stephen. In more recent times the historic work of Béla Grünwald on the social and political condition of Hungary from 1711 to 1825 ("*A régi Magyarország*") has elaborated the ideas of Eötvös with the armoury of learned footnotes and systematic chapters. The novel of Eötvös is still the text of all the loud centralists in Hungary, to whom the county selfgovernment is an absurd anachronism. As a matter of fact, on the continent, Hungary is the only country where local selfgovernment is still extant. Nor can there be any doubt, that that local selfgovernment alone enabled the Magyars to hold their supremacy over the numerically stronger nations in their country. Taking the British constitution as the model of all representative government, we cannot go astray in claiming for such government three absolutely indispensable elements. First, a parliament proper, consisting of two Chambers or Houses; secondly, a cabinet proper; and thirdly, two or three real and energetic political parties, the numerous members of which take an intense interest in every one of the political issues of the day. Applying this standard to the United States, for instance, we find, that the Americans while having a federal, two-chambered parliament and also two or more genuine parties, yet have no Cabinet proper; and hence many of the features of political corruption

that were rampant in England in the times from Charles II. to George III., when the Cabinet was still forming, and not yet formed, may be noticed in the United States at the present day. In the same way France has a Cabinet indeed, and also a two-chambered parliament; but genuine political parties, with members intensely interested in politics, are wanting. Hence the instability and irregularity of the French representative government. In Hungary, and there alone, the student of politics will find a perfect replica of the British constitution, in that the fine superstructure of Parliament and Cabinet is based on the broad pedestal of genuine political parties. The members of these parties take a real, passionate and untiring interest in political questions of any kind, and hence there is a real public opinion, a real nation. This basis of the political life in Hungary, where has it been quarried from but in the local selfgovernment of the counties? Interest in the mostly arid questions of politics can be acquired only by early and constant contact with men who make it almost the chief interest of their lives. It is in the county halls, and in the social reunions of the county-gentry, that the young Magyars learn the great lesson of dispensing authority, commanding respect and discussing public business with tact and prudence. It is there that men were formed who could at all times find resources to

withstand the anti-national policy of the Habsburgs or the occasional rebellions of the Slav or Roumanian peasantry. Of the country-gentlemen in Hungary indeed may be said, what Macaulay wrote of the English esquire of the seventeenth century: that "his ignorance and uncouthness, his low tastes and gross phrases, would, in our time, be considered as indicating a nature and a breeding thoroughly plebeian. Yet he was essentially a patrician, and had, in large measure, both the virtues and vices which flourish among men set from their birth in high place, and accustomed to authority, to observance and to self-respect." (*History of England*, Ch. III.) It was amongst these rough squires that the two great parties of England were formed. It was likewise amongst the much derided *táblabirók* and *szolgabirók* (squires and justices) of Hungary, that the men of 1825 and 1848 were formed; and in our time they have given Hungary one of the indispensable elements of representative government: real political parties.

It appears necessary to dwell at some length on the great historic and political questions underlying the famous novel of Eötvös. No doubt, every Hungarian cannot but wish to see that novel in the hands of all who take an interest in Hungary. For, "The Village Notary" contains capital portraits of many a quaint, wild or pathetic

type of inner Hungary. The down-trodden notary (Tengelyi); the tyrannical *szolgabíró* (or squire) Paul Nyúzó (meaning: flayer); Viola, the honest peasant, who being shamefully wronged betakes himself to the forest and *pusztas* (prairies) to lead the life of a robber; Mrs. Réty, the wife of the chief magistrate of the county, who is entangled in a fearful domestic tragedy, etc., etc. Moreover, the novel contains excellent pieces of irony and satire; and being reared on the broad idea of social reform never sinks to mere pamphleteering. Yet, with all that, we cannot but protest against the misstatement of the political importance of county-life in Hungary as advanced in that novel. Fully acknowledging, as we do, its literary value, which is diminished only by the heavy and un-Magyar diction, we deprecate its judgment on an institution without which Hungary would have long been reduced to the level of a mere province of Austria. Eötvös, like most idealists bred in the school of German idealism, could not endure rough Reality. He forgot, that for the making of history, as for that of bread, unclean matter is, at certain stages, an indispensable element.

We have two more novels by Eötvös: "Hungary in 1514" ("*Magyarország 1514 ben*," 1847), which is a fair picture of the time of the peasant-rebellion in Hungary, under George Dózsa; and "The Sisters" ("*A nővérek*," 1857), a feeble story with many ideas on Education.

On Eötvös, as a writer on politics, and the Philosophy of History, see page 251. It may here be mentioned that Eötvös, who was President of the Academy, was frequently called upon to deliver commemorative discourses on the lives and merits of deceased members of the Academy and the Kisfaludy Society (see page 113). His speeches are, as a rule, of great oratorical power, and illuminated with grand conceptions of Life and Literature. He was eminently an orator, not a rhetor; and although he seldom reached the magnificence of Kölcsey (see page 107), he is no unworthy follower of him.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

AT the present day most people of culture outside Hungary know the name of Jókai, the Hungarian novelist; few, if any, know the name of Sigismund Kemény. Yet, of the two, Kemény is probably the greater writer. He is the Balzac of Hungary, less Balzac's fame. For, strange to say, in Hungary itself, the novels of Kemény are very little known; and although several Magyar critics of the highest authority have declared Kemény to be the greatest novelist of the Hungarians, yet the reading public in Hungary neither buys nor reads the masterpieces of the Transylvanian baron. This lack of general appreciation seems to be somewhat inherent in the very kind of genius possessed by men like Balzac and Kemény. The former, it is true, has a well-known name, and his works have spread over Europe and America. Yet, even in France, the full grandeur of his genius has not yet been recognized. Balzac has, as yet, no statue in Paris, which city he has described more ingeniously

than any other writer. Even in his native town of Tours his statue was erected only in quite recent times. The *Académie* has never admitted him within her circle; and the French are not yet aware that in Balzac they have their Shakespeare in prose. Indeed, nobody short of Shakespeare will stand comparison with the gigantic genius of Balzac. Both have created a long series of grand types of humanity endowed with an undying life and charm of their own. To both the secrets and puzzles of the human soul were transparent; and both had the powers of philosophic analysis and poetic synthesis in equal shares. Shakespeare, too, had to bide his time; and twenty-eight years after his death, John Milton does not even mention his dramas as necessary reading for a young gentleman's education. Considering, then, the fate of Balzac in France, with an eager reading public immeasurably more numerous than that of Hungary, we need not wonder that Kemény suffered with tenfold intensity from the drawbacks peculiar to his Balzacian genius.

We said, Kemény is the Balzac of Hungary. We did not say, he was equal to Balzac. In Hungary a full-fledged Balzac can as yet not be expected. No amount of native genius will enable a man to overcome obstacles such as stand in the way of him who should undertake to do for Hungarian society what Balzac did for French.



The France of Louis-Philippe was infinitely better adapted to the writing of its "*Comédie humaine*," than the Hungary of Kemény's time.

Hungary is far from being as homogeneous as is France. In the latter country, despite much variety in language and social institutions, there is one pervading common spirit in all classes and peoples of the state. Whether Norman or Gascon, the citizen of France is chiefly a Frenchman, with distinctly French ideas and sentiments. France is the country of the French. Hungary is not the country of the Hungarians; it is a trysting-place of nations rather than the country of one nation. There are not only classes and ranks, but each class or rank differs according to the nation it belongs to. The Magyar *bourgeois* is not like the Slav *bourgeois*; and both differed, especially in Kemény's time, from the German *bourgeois*. No one, certainly not Kemény, can claim an intimate knowledge of all the nations in Hungary; and thus no one has, as yet, so profoundly impregnated himself with as immense an array of social facts as had Balzac before he wrote his great novels. Balzac knew the entire anatomy and physiology of the peasant, the soldier, the clergyman, the provincial, the Parisian, the maid, the *concierge*, the *bourgeoise*, the *grande dame*, the actress, the scholar, the lawyer, the speculator, the *viveur*, the diplomatist—in short,

of every shade of character that went to form French society. In Hungary, such a knowledge could not be acquired. Familiarity with ten to twelve languages is required to know the full anatomy and physiology of the peasants in Hungary alone. To do, therefore, for Hungarian society what Balzac had done for French; to write the Hungarian "*Comédie humaine*" has so far been practically impossible; nor did Kemény do it. And yet, within the narrow limits of his arena, Kemény worked with the spirit and genius of Balzac. That his capacity was essentially akin to that of the great French writer there can be no doubt. It was not of the same comprehensiveness. Balzac had humour and wit; Kemény had none. Balzac had an exquisite sense of proportion, if not always in his style, at least always in the architecture of his plot; Kemény had not. Balzac was an encyclopædist of the human heart, in that he knew women as well as men; Kemény knew men far better than women. Balzac's range of observation being greater, his mind was subtler even than that of Kemény. Yet, with all that, Kemény's genius was essentially akin to that of Balzac. He, too, had that vast knowledge of historic events and that interest in scientific researches that suggested to Balzac innumerable shades and innuendoes of thought, and *aperçus* on every form and phase of life.

Kemény, like Balzac, had studied much in books and nature and man; he also had that love of realism—that following up of mental or emotional waves into their minutest recesses in the face or voice or gestures of persons. The outward or material appearance of man: his dress, house, arms, art-work, or contrivances were a matter of profound study to Kemény, as they were to Balzac. Although intensely analytical, he is equally great at and fond of descriptions. He paints nature, more especially that of his beloved Transylvania, as one intimate with mountains, rivers and forests. He knows their language and physiognomy; his landscapes are like the choruses in Greek tragedies. They form part of the scenes; not only of the scenery. They are like the contrapuntal bass to the melodies of his novels. But in what Kemény resembles Balzac most is his inexorableness. There is no other word for it. In nearly all his novels, as in most of those of Balzac, man is crushed down pitilessly, remorselessly. Without making any deliberate show of pessimism, Kemény is intensely pessimistic. As in Balzac the overpowering demon of modern times is money, after which all crave, all run and rush, jostling, panting, jading; so in Kemény, the bane of man appears under the form of those small mistakes and errors which dig the grave of all hopes. The great passions, vices and crimes do

not, in Kemény's novels, act as the causes of the final downfall of his heroes or heroines. His heroes do not die from strokes of lightning, shooting forth from the black clouds of their terrible passions or heinous crimes. On the contrary: such lightnings rather illumine their road to success. They end, as it were, through a fire caused by a carelessly dropped match. The ghastly irony of real life, which no unbiassed observer can have failed to notice, is shown in his novels in all its terrible working. The melancholy of Eötvös is sweet and soothing; the gloom of Kemény is discomfoting, distressing, just because Kemény never seems to be deliberately pessimistic. While reading his novels, the reader is so struck with the beauty of those gems of original and profound ideas and remarks, which Kemény strews in prodigious abundance over the objects and persons of his novels, that the persistent gloom and despair dominating nearly all his works, do not become so painful to the reader. It is when we have finished the book; when we overlook the whole of the plan; when we have laid our ear on the throbbing heart of each of the persons with whom we had been through several volumes; it is when the novel in its entirety has entered our mind, that we feel deserted by all hopefulness, and embittered by the foul destiny reigning over man's best efforts. There can be but little doubt

that the indifference, with which Kemény has been so far received in Hungary, is largely owing to his pessimism. The Hungarians, like the English, have little idiosyncrasy for pessimism. This mood of viewing things is the outcome of mental struggles, from which the better minds of both countries have been saved by their intense political life. Pessimism is eminently the nursling of thought. In Hungary there is, as in England, much more acting than thinking. Whatever there may be of pessimism in the Hungarians is used up in some of their superbly-despondent folk-songs. For Kemény's pessimism the time has not yet come. Perhaps he would have impressed his contemporaries far more deeply had he chosen not to write historic novels. Nearly all of his great novels are historic novels. As history, they are really incomparable. If we possessed a hundred historic novels, describing a hundred important periods of general history, in the manner, with the graphic power and true intimacy with the past, so peculiar to Kemény, we should know history infinitely better. Kemény has something of the erudition of a Gierke or John Selden, with the plastic descriptiveness of a great painter. Read his Transylvanian novels, and you have a clearer, more vivid and more correct knowledge of Transylvanian history in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries than you could gather from

the study of the various chroniclers and memoir-writers of that time, such as Reicherstorffer, Sche-saeus, Sigler, Heltai (see page 47), Verantius, Tinódy (see page 47), Somogyi (Ambrosius), Stephen Szamosközy, Nicolas Oláh, Zsámboky, Michael Brutus, Francis Forgách, Nicolas Istvánffy, Francis Mikó, Gregory Petthő, Kraus, the Bethlens, Haner, etc. Kemény is thus one of the best historians of Hungary. Nor can we think much less of him as a novelist. He engages our interest in the characters of his tales; they work on our imagination, they appeal to our hearts. More particularly to Hungarians, the actors of Kemény's novels appear as individuals full of charm and significance. To use one of Ben Jonson's happy phrases, they are "rammed with life"—life national, patriotic, historic. And yet, with all these commanding excellencies in his novels, Kemény has, there can be little doubt, committed a grave blunder in literary strategy, in investing the output of his vast intellectual mines in historic novels. Had he been less of a historian, he might have written his historic novels at a smaller loss of literary efficiency. His very greatness as a historian debarred him from approaching Balzac still more closely. For his faithfulness as a historian prevented him from elaborating fully those types of humanity, the creation of which is Balzac's glory. Such types cannot, as a rule, be found in history.

History, or that part of reality in which human beings are the actors, is full of blurred types of mongreldom and bastardy. No line in the features of man, as a real phenomenon, is drawn out purely and to its legitimate term; good and bad, sublime and vile, sentiments and deeds, are lumbering higgledy piggledy across each other. The poet or artist, who is truest to reality, is untruest to poetry and art. At all times the attempt at realism in art has landed where has the attempt at materialism in philosophy—in impotence. Historic novels, if very historic, as are these of Kemény, must thus necessarily benumb the creative power of the poet. And so they have. Had Kemény, instead of the past, embraced the present; had he followed in the wake of Balzac in fetching from the depth of Hungarian humanity some of the arch-types of European humanity, as was done by the author of "*Père Goriot*" with regard to French humanity, Kemény would stand out as one of the greatest writers of European literature. As it is, he is only one of the great writers of Hungarian Literature. What is perhaps more astonishing still in that choice of the historic novel by Kemény, is the fact that he was for years engaged in a profession than which very few can attach us more intently to actual, present life. Kemény was one of the most influential and hardest-worked political journalists of his

time. In the columns of the "*Pesti Napló*" he poured out, in astounding profusion, leading articles about all the great events and persons of his time. In these articles he showed profound knowledge of the very pulse and heart of his age; and such was his power of exposition, analysis and appreciation of the fleeting occurrences of the day, that his political articles have been a matter of admiration both to his contemporaries and subsequent historians. As a rule, great politicians do not write historic novels. They are too much imbued with the spirit of their own age, in the direction of which they have had no small share, to be inclined, or even able, to familiarise themselves with the spirit of ages bygone. Kemény is an exception, and while this certainly testifies to the comprehensiveness of his mind, it renders the strategic mistake above mentioned more marked still.

We must abstain from giving a detailed account of his novels. Their plots are, by themselves, simple, if not purely on the lines of the historic events which they relate. Their author, like Balzac, excels chiefly in psychology and analysis; and although the dialogue is not neglected, it is not made the centre of the tale. In "*Gyulai Pál*" (1846) is shown the struggle between a noble and high-minded statesman and his ambition. In the attempt at saving his prince,



Sigismund Bathori, from the latter's rival, Balthesar Báthori, Gyulai plunges into a series of crimes, and mortally wounds the heart of his idol, Eleonore, who finally brings about his execution. In "The Widow and Her Daughter" (*Az özvegy és leánya*, 1857) is told, and with greater regard to form and architecture than in Kemény's other novels, the tragedy of the family of Mikes. A subject admirably suited to the gloom of Kemény's mental atmosphere is treated in his "The Fanatics" ("A rajongók," 1859), a story of the curious sect of the Sabbatarians in Transylvania in the fourth decade of the seventeenth century (*cf.* page 55). The Macchiavellian prime minister, Kassai, on the one hand, and the rich and mystic Simon Pécsi, the head of the Sabbatarians, with his beautiful daughter Deborah, on the other, are amongst the leading persons of this terrible novel. No less appalling in its way is "Rough Times" (*Zord idő*, 1862), in which the capture of the Hungarian capital, Buda, by the Turks, is told with magnificent power. In the short novels of Kemény, taking up subjects of modern time ("Love and Vanity" [*Szerelem és hiúság*]); "Husband and Wife" [*Férj és nő*]; "The Abysses of the Heart" [*A szív örvényei*]); as well as in his smaller tales, such as "Virtue and Convention" (*Erény és illem*); "Two Happy Persons" (*Két boldog*); "Alhi Kmet" (a proper name), etc.,

Kemény likewise dwells on that *fatalisme raisonné* as it might be called, that does not permit him, or very rarely, to tarry over the sunny moments of life. Writers like Kemény, in quite modern times, have found means of gently veiling their inner despondency by light touches of melancholy, as is done by Maeterlinck; or by fine irony, as used by Anatole France. In Kemény there is no mercy, not even that of irony. His novels are like the gigantic inundations of the Theiss river in Hungary: you see the floods nearing, often noiselessly, but with distressing rapidity, and in all directions; there is no escaping them; in their inexorable progress they roll onward like a host of innumerable serpents, stifling life and levelling down everything to the sameness of death. When Kemény died (1875), on his small paternal estate of Puszta-Kamarás, in Transylvania, he had himself long been buried by the floods of mental derangement. Reality had shown him no pity either.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

THE poets and writers of the Magyars, whom we have been studying in the preceding chapters, were, in a lesser or higher degree, authors of works whose excellence was, to a large extent, of a relative, or national and not of an absolute character.

We now approach the study of Alexander Petöfi. His was a genius which, perhaps alone amongst Hungarian writers, so completely blended the peculiar national excellencies of Magyar poetry with the broader features of European literary greatness, as to entitle him to the admiration of all who can feel poetic beauty, irrespective of nationality or even language. Real poetry, like real music, appeals to all nations, and to all times. In Petöfi there is real poetry. Other poets are felicitous in expression, and the musical cadence of their diction endears them to their compatriots. Others again create one or two poetical types the charm of which lends grace and interest to even insignificant verses. Many more poets again play on religious, moral,

or patriotic sentiments, and thus appeal to the hearts or imagination of readers with whom such sentiments easily wax overwhelming. In Petőfi there is more than all that. His language is rich and beautiful; yet it is not in his language that he excels. He never or very seldom borrows effect from appeals to morals or religion. He creates poetical phenomena—that is all. Where before him nobody ever surmised any poetic phenomena at all, there he conjures up a whole fairy-world of poetic conceptions, figures, events, or scenes. The true poet discovers the new land by creating it. In Nature herself there is no more poetry than in a grocer's shop. Nor is there a trace of any other thought in Nature. There is no philosophy in it and no mathematics. Heaven alone knows how Nature is carrying on her business. She is the most wasteful of managers, and yet she is never bankrupt. She is as heedless as the most thoughtless of business men, and yet traces of profound thought appear to be discoverable in her dealings. And so the mathematician, or the physicist arrives at neatly limbed formulæ expressing so-called laws of Nature. Yet nothing can be more certain than that Nature herself is not acting on the lines of laws. To us, to human beings, it appears convenient and useful to bracket some of the happenings of infinite Nature between logical ideas, thereby giving us

the satisfaction of "understanding" those happenings. Nature abhors being understood, yet by dint of an irrepressible desire of man, thinkers will always attempt at construing her by dressing up natural phenomena in the jackets of formulæ and in the petticoats of concepts.

It is even so with poetry. There is no poetry whatever in Nature. All poetry is invented and created by man, just as all music is. He who invents the greatest number of events, scenes, or types that strike men as being poetical, is the greatest of poets. It is impossible to say how he invents them; nor can he or anybody else say where, that is, with relation to what spot, creature, or phenomenon of Nature he will invent them. One thing alone is certain, he must *invent* them. For centuries before Petöfi was born, Hungary had had the same mixed population; the same mountains; the same mighty rivers and lakes; and the same mysterious *puszta*, which to Petöfi suggested an astounding number of exquisite poems. He alone "understood their mystic language;" that is, he alone invented the poetry to the substratum of Nature; he alone wrote the thrilling drama to the dumb flutes and staging of Nature in Hungary. He sees an old ram-shackle inn in the midst of the *puszta*. To the ordinary mortal the inn is suggestive of nothing more than the expectation

of a poor dinner, of a bad bedstead, of uncanny companions. To an ordinary poet it may suggest images of decay or regret, more or less poetical. To Petöfi it suggests intensely poetical scenes of life exuberant or decadent; the inn ("*csárda*") is transfigured by him into a living being; every one of its corners commences to breathe poetry, music, reminiscences and forebodings. So new and individual a creation is thus made of that wayside inn, that the painter may find in it new subjects for his canvas, and the musician new themes for his lyre. Wherever Petöfi is touched by nature or society, he responds by the creation of poetic phenomena. The wind blowing over the plains of Hungary is, in truth, inarticulate; in wafting through the body and soul of the incomparable poet it turns, as if directed through the pipes of an organ at the hands of a Bach, to melancholy fugues and majestic oratorios. And so with everything. Petöfi sings love in hundreds of poems, yet he was scarcely ever loved by woman. For nearer as woman is to Nature, she is also more realistic and less charged with poetry than man. What then could she do with one who had unloaded into the chests of his youthful soul all the treasures of poetry, but none of gold? This, however, far from deterring Petöfi or disgusting him, rather stimulated him. He loved much; that is, he

loved little. Love was for him, like the *puszta*, the Theiss river and the Carpathian mountains, an immense suggestiveness; an ocean, the crossing of which led to the discovery of new continents of poetry. Nearly all the pretty or interesting women whom he met, whether the lawless gipsy-girl, the actress, the coy *bourgeoise*, the lady, the peasant-girl or the hostelry-maid, he loved them all or thought he did. And this was owing not to his extreme youth—he died when six-and-twenty—but to his passion for poetic creativeness. Everyone of the types of women just mentioned served him as an occasion for creating one of those scenes as replete with life poetic as are forests or rivers with life natural. In one sense indeed he was right in saying that he was “the wild flower of boundless Nature” (“*A korlátatlan természet-Vadvirága vagyok én*”). His mode of creation was quite on the lines of that of Nature. A poem grew out of his mind as does a violet out of the ground. In him there is no reflection, no machinery, no hesitation. Every line rolls on with the assurance and self-contentedness of a rose-leaf budding forth from the stem. He has the meditated carelessness of Nature, and also her freshness, her immediateness and spontaneity. More particularly, he is like Nature in Hungary. From the heights of thought as lofty as the peaks of the

Carpathian mountains, and as chilling as those snow-clad solitudes (see his superb philosophic flashes in the poems written at Szalk Szt Márton, in 1846), he descends into the tiny nest of homely sentiments as does a lark into the furrow. His indignation, patriotic or otherwise, is as terrible as are the inundations of the Theiss; and side by side with poems flaming with uncontrollable fire and restlessness are poems full of oriental calm and staid repose. Yet, in the poet's own opinion, he resembled most the *puszta* or immense plain of Hungary. Petöfi, who had tramped over nearly every part of his country, gave, in a magnificent poem, the palm of beauty to the steppes and pampas of central and southern Hungary. The *puszta* in Hungary is really a series of some three thousand *puszta*s, of which the most famous is that of Hortobágy, near Debreczen, the praises of which Petöfi has sung in various exquisite poems. These *puszta*s differ very much in physical character; some are covered with rich wheat-fields, tobacco plantations, or maize-forests; others again are swamps, or natron-ponds, or again waste lands, or heaths. This diversity of abundance and penury, ecstasy of nature and dreary desert, squares well with the rhapsodic temper of the Magyars in general, and that of Petöfi in particular. After miles



and miles of deadly silence, the traveller enters one of the bustling "market-towns," full of the eccentric and picturesque types of the *puszta*. There is the dignified farmer or peasant, with his smart, coquettish, and light-tongued wife, or *mennyecske* ("little heaven"); there are the various shepherds and keepers of sheep ("*bojtár*"), oxen ("*gulyás*"), swine ("*kondás*"), or horses ("*csikós*"), each in his particular costume and each a different type of the Hungarian Bedouin. The "*bojtár*," tending the immense herds of sheep and lambs in the pampas, is mild-tempered, musical and full of secret medical lore. The animals under his care are frequently ill, and he watches their instinctive ways of picking out the herbs that will cure them. So he acquires a knowledge of herbs and an insight into nature which makes him appear a wizard. The "*gulyás*" tends the big cattle, oxen and bulls, and is naturally a rough fellow, fond of fight and of wild rollicking. He frequently wrestles with enraged bulls that have fled into the swamps, or with the poachers and robbers roaming over the *puszta*. The "*kondás*" is the lowest type of those herdsmen. He is sullen, hard of access, and irascible, and easily turns into a robber. The most brilliant type is the "*csikós*." He tends the immense herds of horses browsing in the prairies of Hungary. As the violin and the *furulya* (or sort of piccolo) are

the national instruments of the Magyars, so the horse is their national animal. "The Magyar is created for being on horseback" (*lóra termett a magyar*), the Hungarian proverb holds. Peasant or nobleman, all are keen horsemen, and so intense is their love of the horse that, like Arabs, Hungarian poets treat the horse as a poetical character. The *csikós* is dashing, quick at repartee, an excellent dancer and singer or rather improvisatore, and grown to his horse. He knows every patch of his *puszta*, and every trick and dodge of horse-dealing and—horse-stealing. The girls idolize him. In his fluttering, highly-coloured costume, he is the very martial, bold and provoking youth whom girls will worship. Amidst these types of the *puszta*, none the least fascinating is the "*szegény legény*," or "poor lad." He is the robber and brigand of the *puszta*, and the romantic interest attaching to him grows out of the belief that he took to his lawless profession after having been thwarted in life or baffled in love. But of all the phenomena of the *puszta*, the Fata Morgana, or *mirage*, in Hungarian "*déli báb*," is the most striking. On a sultry afternoon in summer, cities appear in mid-heaven, images of towers and castles, immense lakes and forests. They shine sometimes with a peculiar, supermundane lustre, and the traveller thinks he is walking in fairy-land. Then suddenly they disappear. Such is the *puszta*.

The influence of the *puszta* on the Magyar poets is undeniable; and Petöfi, more than any other Hungarian poet, seems to be the high-priest and devotee of the peculiar charms of the great plain. The real relation, however, between the poet and his country is that between the traveller and the mirage. It is in the eyes of the former that the latter is forming, and there alone. Petöfi creates the Fata Morgana, with which he fills the vast horizon of his beloved *puszta*. Although professionally a lyric poet, his lyrics are of the purely objective kind. Many of his best poems might be told in prose, and in any other language, without losing much of their charm. There is, in his best works, an abiding *fond* of poetry, quite independent of the music or picturesqueness of his words, or the strikingness of his similes. Heine, in his best moments, rivals without always equalling him. Petöfi's poems are mostly very short; they, as it were, only state the poetic scene which then works on the imagination or heart of the reader quite alone. When Heine speaks of the lonely pine-tree standing on the snow-covered heights of the north, dreaming of a palm perched in the far east on a rock burning with the heat of the sun of the desert, he strikes a chord that will vibrate in us long after and beyond the two simple stanzas in which he tells the story of the

two trees. This is objective poetry. It is in this that Petöfi excels. Already in some of his earliest poems he writes perfect objective poetry. In "The Stolen Horse" ("*Lopott ló,*" 1843) we are told of one of those fleeting scenes in puszta-life, in which the poet by seizing the pregnant point where present, past and future meet, gives us the story of several lives in words so few as to seem insufficient for the telling even of a short anecdote. A *csikós* dashes on a stolen horse over the vast plain. The rich owner of the noble animal, happening to pass by, recognizes his property, and calls upon the *csikós* to stop and surrender the horse. The fellow takes no heed, and storms onward. Suddenly he stops, and turning round to the owner, he exclaims, "Don't miss your horse too badly; you have so many of them. One heart was in my breast, and alas! your daughter has wrecked it;" and disappears in the desert. The story of the poor boy's love for the haughty daughter of the rich man, her cruelty, the father's pride, the boy's vengeance, his entrance on the wild life of a "poor lad," or robber; all that is pictured and suggested in the few words. In another poem, the first line of which is "The wife of the inn-keeper loved the vagabond" ("*A csaplárosné a betyárt szerette,*" 1844), the whole tragedy of true love thwarted by lawless love is told in a few lines.

The vagabond (" *betyár*," really "robber") loves the maid of the wife of an inn-keeper in the *puszta*. The wife loves the robber, and being cut by him, drives away the poor girl, who dies of cold in the *puszta*. The robber thereupon kills the woman, and dies on the gallows, without regret, for "his life was no longer worth to him a pipe of tobacco." Another poem describes the wild rollicking of the boys in the village inn at night. A knock is heard at the window, and a harsh voice bids the boys to stop lest the quiet of the squire be disturbed. The boys only hold forth all the louder. Another knock at the window is heard. In mild tones a man asks the fellows to stop yelling, for his poor mother is ill. At once all the frolic is at an end, and the boys leave the inn. It is in such scenes, all expressed in the simplest and yet idiomatic language, that Petöfi's genius shines forth. Of him indeed it may be said that no colour, tint or instrument with which to touch and stir up the human heart was alien to him. Considering his extreme youth and the intense gravity of his pathos, his exquisite and genuine humour is nothing short of marvellous. It is the humour of a mature mind, full of ripe suavity and mellow joyousness. Of Petöfi's humour we could not use Hood's lines :

"There's not a string attuned to mirth  
But has its chord in melancholy."

It is playful humour, laughing a broad, sound laugh. He is not as witty as Heine or Byron, but neither is he as cutting. In his famous poem ridiculing the Magyar *hidalgo* ("A magyar *nemes*") there is nothing but broad thrusts of a well-handled sword. There is no pricking with needles, nor any guffaws of a satyr.

Literary critics in Hungary and elsewhere have, in their anxiety for classification and cataloguing, placed Petöfi amongst the so-called folk-poets, and nothing is more frequent than a comparison of Petöfi with Burns and Béranger, the *chansonniers* of Scotland and France respectively. However, the comparison is untenable. While humour, pathos, tenderness and descriptive powers will readily be accorded, and in great measure, to the Scotch singer, he can hardly be compared to Petöfi in that distinctively creative power, which not only touches sentiment, not only finds charming words and images for things external or internal, but also and chiefly discovers new poetic continents, so to speak, new mines of poetic gold. The very range of subjects covered by the poetry of the Hungarian poet is considerably wider than that of the Scotch bard; and in the last two years of his life Petöfi was raised, partly by his own genius and partly by the events of his time, to the position of a nation's prophet. This very position acted on his poetic

gifts with a force that Burns never experienced, and accordingly, every comparison of the two poets is radically false. The same remark applies to Béranger. The entire atmosphere of his famous *chansons* is so different from that of Petöfi's songs, as to render a comparison of the two impossible. Béranger sings the glories of the great Revolution and of Napoleon's time. He is sweet, fresh, graceful, full of *élan* and smartness. He creates a *genre*, a mode of poetry, but a limited one. Petöfi was impressed by both poets; he knew Burns and Béranger well, and studied them, together with Shelley, Byron, and Heine, pretty carefully. But he never imitated them, and for the simple reason that he could not do so. He was in the best sense of the word, original, that is, creative. He could imitate no one, and no one could imitate him. Petöfi cannot be classified; he is a class by himself. He cultivates, it is true, the manner and tone of the folk-song ("*népdal*"), and so to superficial critics he may appear only as the best folk-song writer of Hungary. He is infinitely more than that; in 1846, for instance, he did not write a single "*népdal*" (folk-song); he is Hungary's greatest poet. In him is embodied the entire poetical genius of a nation, in whose single members we may frequently find the gift of improvisation and poetic invention. The

rhapsodic vein so conspicuous in the everyday life of Hungary, and the exaggerations of which have vitiated many an effort, literary or musical, comes out in Petőfi in its full vigour and full beauty. Like all great poets, he is intensely truthful. There is no sham whatever in him, no affectation and no false note. His passion is terribly real, and his mirth, true joy. Nowhere can this absolute truthfulness be noticed with greater clearness; nowhere does it shine forth more imposingly than in one of Petőfi's wildest, and apparently most exaggerated poems, "The Madman" ("*Az öriült*"). It is a monologue of a mad Titan, whose fine intellect has been unhinged by ingratitude of friends, treachery of women, and undeserved reverses. We do not hesitate to say that there is in the whole range of European literature no other single poem representing the demoniac charm of a mind at once vigorous and diseased with equal force and truth. Constantly moving on the edges of abysses than which the human mind or heart does not know any more appalling, the "madman" yet talks with a power and lucidity so overwhelming as to send through his hearers the holy shivers of religious prostration. Distorted in form, terribly true in substance; such is the character of this unique poem, in which all the serpents of scorn and pain seem to



wriggle beneath the leaves of the beautiful word-foliage.

From Petöfi emanates the very soul of poetry and of all art: enthusiasm, inspiration. After having written comic epics, love-poems, and genre-pictures with a success never before witnessed, Petöfi, on the approach of the revolutionary period, wrote those inflammatory patriotic songs, the power of which was officially recognized by the Hungarian Government, who had enormous numbers of Petöfi's patriotic poetry printed at their expense and distributed among the soldiers of the revolutionary armies. His poems were then a national event, and they may in justice be compared to a series of different "*Marseillaises*."

We began our characterization of Petöfi by saying that he, perhaps alone amongst Hungarian writers, completely blended Hungarian with European elements. We may now state the reason of this his peculiar excellence. Petöfi, like all classical poets, while very great as a master of form, owes less to the beauty or ornaments of his language than to the objective beauty of his imagery, personifications and poetic scenes. For such as largely identify literature with great word-feats, Virgil will be greater than Homer (as was commonly believed in the seventeenth century); Tennyson greater than Shelley; Platen greater than Heine; and Arany (see page 194)

greater than Petöfi. This is, however, not the judgment of such as gauge poetic greatness by the measure of objective beauty contained in a given work. The importance of form in poetry can hardly be exaggerated, and the necessity of paying the closest attention to the rules of form will be felt by no one more keenly than by the student of Hungarian Literature. Yet in attempting to find a measure of comparison between great poets, who all more or less excel in form, there can be no doubt, that he who is richer in objective beauty is also the superior poet. It is this superiority that raises Petöfi head and shoulders not only over the rest of the Hungarian poets, but also above most other poetic writers of modern Europe. The types of the *puszta*, which we have essayed to sketch above, the women, and events of his time; all these and many more Magyar subjects were by Petöfi so *objectivated*, and given an independent poetic existence of their own, that they cease to be familiar to Hungarians only. They grow on the German, French or English reader with equal sympathy, and Petöfi thus needs less commentary for the foreigner than any other Hungarian poet. His works are like the Hungarian Rhapsodies of Liszt, which appeal to Americans with the same irresistible force as to Magyars, as the present writer has had abundant

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opportunity of experiencing in the United States. Yet the same Magyar melodies and turbulent cadences that Liszt, and Liszt alone, succeeded in *objectivating*, utterly fail of effect in countries other than Hungary when played by Hungarian gypsies in unadulterated Magyar fashion. This, then, is the deepest and truest secret of Petöfi's immense power: while embracing mostly Magyar subjects, he so *objectivates* them as to render them enjoyable and sympathetic to non-Magyar readers too. National poets inferior to Petöfi give their nation songs which other nations too possess, and the only difference between them is that of language. Petöfi gave Hungary and the rest of the civilized world what no nation other than the Hungarian possesses. As the Hungarian nation itself has an individuality so marked and so different from the other nations of Europe, as to entail upon it an historic and social vocation *sui generis*, so the poems of Petöfi, as the most felicitous exponent of Hungarian nationality, add to the types of poetry produced by other nations, a type, a species so individual and so richly personal as to endow it with a literary vocation altogether its own. If we are to reduce this peculiarly Magyar element to the precincts of a word, we should say it is the rhapsodic element. By this we mean a peculiar temper of the inspired mind

pervading its joyous, humorous, meditative or despondent moods alike. As Liszt is the greatest exponent of this rhapsodic element in music, so Petöfi is in poetry. Most other rhapsodic poets or musicians, Magyar or otherwise, have badly failed, some by degenerating into rant or redundancy, others by becoming formless. Petöfi alone succeeded in raising rhapsodies to the level of true art.

It was said above that Petöfi's works are not in need of much commentary, even for the foreigner. We may now add that the only commentary needed is a knowledge of Petöfi's life. Petöfi's short life as a poet was coeval with the great awakening of the Magyar nation to the full consciousness of its position and its rights. He was born in 1823, in Kis-Körös, and was the son of a well-to-do butcher, by the name of Petrovics, husband to a Slav woman, called Mary Hruz. For historians who believe in the race-theory, there is ample room for speculation, sympathetic or malevolent, in the fact that the beloved mother of Hungary's greatest Magyar poet belonged to the "race" of the Slavs, whom all staunch Magyars are disinclined to reckon amongst human beings. "*Tót nem ember, kása nem étel*" ("The Slav is no human being, and porridge is no meal"), holds the Hungarian proverb. Fully convinced as we are that there

is no truth whatever in the race-theory, we can only see in the fact of Petöfi being the child of a Slav mother and a Magyar (or Magyar-speaking) father a providential fact creating Hungary's greatest poet from amongst a *milieu* saturated with both of the main elements of Hungarian society: Magyar and Slav. Young Petöfi spent his youth in the large plains between the Theiss and the Danube, and the impressions of that picturesque portion of Hungary have left their indelible traces on his imagination. At the age of fifteen, Petöfi was deprived of the comfort he had so far enjoyed, by the financial failure of his father. From that time onward he led a life replete with hardships of all kinds. At school he was a failure, and even in poetics, as he has told us in one of his humorous poems, he was "ploughed." Being somewhat too fond of the inspiration of the wine-cup, or at least being credited with such fondness, he soon fell out with his hosts, his teachers and finally with his father. From the misery of his position he tried to save himself by volunteering as a private in the Austrian army. The very harsh treatment he had to endure as a soldier told on his health, and although he had still moral strength left to scribble his poems on the planks of the sentry-box in which he mounted guard during the

bitter winter, he at last was dismissed from the service on account of symptoms of consumption. In the following two or three years we find him tramping over all Hungary, writing verse, and eking out a miserable livelihood by means of acting on provincial stages. The great poet long believed in his vocation as an actor, and obstinately stuck to a determination that met nowhere with any serious encouragement. Meanwhile, however, his verses had made him a well-known poet, and soon the idol of the country. In his travels to the north of Hungary he was received, more especially at Kassa and Eperjes, with honours usually accorded only to royalty. The nation felt that he was the living personification of all the political and poetical aspirations of the Magyars then struggling for manifestation. In 1846 he made, in the county of Szathmár, the acquaintance of that strange and ill-balanced girl, who was to become his wife. Juliet Szendrey was her name. She was the daughter of a steward on one of the great estates of a Hungarian nobleman, and had from early years shown symptoms of that malady which is now more widely known under the name of "new womanism," or "*féminisme*." Accordingly, she was eccentric and aimless, and when Petőfi made love to her she was at a loss how to respond to a feeling so simple and natural. Having given Petőfi

some cruel samples of the waywardness of her temper, it occurred to her that she might inflict even more pain on her father by marrying the poor poet, and consequently she did so against the wish of her parent. The young couple lived in very primitive lodgings in Pest, and Madame took her fame as the wife of a great man with very grand airs. She so intensely appreciated the happiness of being wedded to a young genius and an affectionate husband, that she married, not quite a year after Petöfi's disappearance on the battlefield of Segesvár, a man in every way infinitely inferior to Petöfi. Can anything prove the Fata Morgana character of poetry and of poets more cruelly than the ever infamous conduct of that highly cultivated woman, who, after having been idolized and, in verses, immortalized by one of the greatest of poets, showed her worthlessness by marrying a mediocrity before a single year had elapsed after the glorious death of her husband, whose infant son still required all her care? But let us return to the poet. A few months after his marriage Petöfi began his political career by announcing to the people of Pest the abolition of the censorship, and by reading to the enthusiastic crowd his famous poem, "Rise o' Magyar" ("*Talpra magyar!*"), on the Ides of March, 1848. Towards the end of the same year he took service in the

revolutionary army, and was attached to the Polish general, Bem, a hero wounded in untold battles for liberty, and then serving the cause of the Magyars in Transylvania. Few letters are more touching than the letters written by Petöfi in fair French to the old warrior, his "father," as he calls him. Bem, himself a genius of character, at once felt and recognized the genius of Petöfi, and with great tact smoothed over difficulties arising from the poet's wild insubordination. Against the advice and in spite of the entreaties of numerous friends, who wanted to save the poet for his country, Petöfi took actual part in various battles. He was last heard of in the battle of Segesvár, in Transylvania, on July 31st, 1849, where he died as he had long wished, fighting for his country. "To live for love, and die for one's country"—he had not only sung it . . . .

The works of Petöfi are both lyrical and epical; his novelistic attempts, "The Rope of the Hangman" (*A hóhér kötele*) are crude, so are his few essays in the drama. Amongst his epics, "*Childe John*" ("*János vitéz*") is the best. It is a comic epic, or rather a fairy-story told with exquisite humour and exuberance of fancy. Another excellent comic epic of his is "*Bolond Istók*." His lyrical poems are very numerous and cover, as has been already indicated, the



whole range of human sentiment. Perhaps it is not superfluous to remark that there is in all the works of Petöfi not a word likely to jar on the ear of the most fastidious moralist. Like himself, his works all breathe the purity and health of untainted youth.

The reader will now perhaps expect a laborious statement of the shortcomings and failings of Petöfi as a poet. And many a Hungarian critic has, apart from his professional duty to fall foul of this or that feature in the literary physiognomy of poets, pointed out some grievous drawbacks in Petöfi's works. Thus, most critics have, while lauding the splendid lyrical subjectivity of Petöfi, pointed out his alleged incapacity to write anything else than himself. His chief deficiency, it has been asserted, is his lack of objective imagination, such as was possessed by the great epic and dramatic writers of European literature. To this the answer is, it appears to us, very simple. Petöfi never wrote a work intended to be an epic proper; nor were his attempts at dramatic composition really serious. He cannot, therefore, be legitimately reproached with having failed where he did not intend to succeed. He never deliberately worked for such achievements of objective imagination as show in the creation of dramatic personalities. Yet most of his

perfect poems manifest, as we have tried to show above, that very objective imagination in the rarest form of strength. Hungarian literary criticism is still, we regret to say, in a stage of development considerably lower than Hungarian literary composition. Hence such judgments on Petöfi. Can we pronounce otherwise on the literary critics of Hungary, who have so far produced no single comprehensive study on the works of a poet who is at once their greatest and most famous genius? Genius has this peculiarity that its works are easy to enjoy but hard to criticise. In reality, it takes another genius, a critical one, to appreciate it adequately. In this respect, foreign literary criticism has been relatively more just to Petöfi. In all the countries of Europe and America, Petöfi's name has been steadily spreading, and numerous attempts at translations of his works have been made in both hemispheres. We do not think that Petöfi is untranslatable. His very objectiveness renders him more fit for free and yet faithful translations than, for instance, Arany (see page 194). Another reason is that Petöfi lays less stress on form and metre than other poets of an equal rank. He who fully seizes the beauty of the poetic subject-matter in Petöfi's poems can render them more or less adequately in any language. More, however,

than by translation might be achieved by Hungarian artists who by picturing the paintable features of Petöfi's poems, would contribute most potently to a general appreciation of his genius. There are hundreds of perfect pictures to be taken from his works, provided the painter takes them from him in the way in which Petöfi took them from nature.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

OUTSIDE Hungary, the name of John Arany is seldom heard; and western readers will be astonished to hear that Arany is considered by many of the best known Magyar critics the greatest of the Hungarian poets. Petöfi has never quite pleased the professors of æsthetics and poetry in the various universities and "*academies*" of Hungary; and there being no Magyar Saint Beuves or August Schlegels, to guide, with tact sustained by learning, and learning eased by tact, the tastes and literary opinions of the professorial minds in Hungary, it is not rare to hear and read of Arany as the greatest poetic genius of the Magyars. We hasten to add, that we readily bow to the greatness and charm, and still more to the merits of Arany. He is a great poet indeed. Nearly every one of his numerous ballads, epics and smaller poems is replete with the glamour of true poetry. In point of language he is, no doubt,

the most idiomatic and richest of all Hungarian writers. Yet, with all these gifts and excellencies, he is not equal to Petöfi. Reaching, as he did, an age nearly three times as protracted as that of Petöfi, he could yet not, through any stretch of time or effort, attain to powers which have been bestowed upon very few poets. Petöfi ranks with the world's greatest poets; Arany ranks only with the great poets of Hungary. To the strictly Magyar Jingo, as well as to the Magyar professor, Arany may appear greater even than Petöfi; we hope to show that his genius is of a nature at once different from and smaller than that of the incomparable Alexander.

The reader will, we trust, permit us to premise a short remark which, especially for English readers, seems indispensable for a right appreciation of Arany. In England there has long ceased to be a peasantry proper; at any rate, there has for now over 400 years been no such peasantry in England, as may still be seen on the continent generally, and in Hungary in particular. The type "peasant" is at once the arch-type of narrow-mindedness, sordidness, *naïveté*, and spontaneous poetry. He is conservative in the extreme and slow, yet frequently the source of great upheavals and revolutions. His speech is concrete and "*terre-à-terre*," yet at the same

time full of quaint metaphors and conceits. His thoughts are all on the line of synthesis; and analysis is as strange to him as generalization. He loves Nature; but he is too much at one with it, part of it, to feel poetically the gulf between Nature and Man. Honour and respect for himself and his ancient customs are as the life-atmosphere of his existence; and thus in the social architecture of the continental state to him is allotted the staying force of the pillars, beams and rafters of the building.\* This, the general picture of the continental peasant, has to be touched up here and there when meant to represent the Hungarian peasant proper. For, luckily for Hungarian poets, the Magyar peasant, while fully as conservative and old-fashioned as his Austrian or German brother, is considerably less sordid, more frank, and altogether more "gentlemanly." Yet he is a peasant, a part both of Hungary's civic and natural complexion. Now it is this Hungarian peasant, and his social complement, the rural nobleman, who are the centre of Arany's poetry. We say "complement," for it is at present well understood by all close

\* No continental writer has described and analysed the social status of the continental peasant with so much charm and truth as has the late Wilhelm Riehl, the Justus Möser of our century.

students of continental nobility, that the latter is, in essence and sociological drift, if not in appearance, one and the same phenomenon as the peasantry. Both classes form the conservative or static forces of continental states, and both are necessary conditions for the existence of a *bourgeois* proper. Without them, or without one of them, the medium or *bourgeois* element is altogether wanting, or, as in England, of a complexion totally at variance with the continental middle class. Now in Hungary, and more especially still, in the Hungary of Arany's youth and first manhood (1840-1870), there was no numerous *bourgeois* proper; and Arany, singing in tones and images flowing from and meant for the two other classes only, is for that very reason *toto coelo* different from most of the German and French and also from English poets. Modern western literature, in Austria and Germany exclusively; in France almost, and in England largely so, is *bourgeois* poetry; poetry written by and for the middle and central classes of the community; or at any rate expressive of sentiments and mental states growing in the atmosphere of *bourgeois* life. The poems of Arany, on the other hand, were growing in the fields and farms of the peasant, and in the manors of the landed nobility; even more in the former than in the

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latter. Theirs is a spirit charming in its rural breeziness and compact humour; fascinating in its *naïveté* and coyness; but somewhat out of tune with the modern or *bourgeois* sentiment. The more the middle or *bourgeois* class develops in Hungary, the less the fame of Arany will continue unimpaired. His works will be unable to satisfy the poetic needs of a class which he did not know, and with which he had but scant sympathy. His very *naïveté*, his greatest poetic charm, will be found wanting. *Naïveté*, like all other tempers of the heart or mind, has its geography, its *locus*. It does not grow anywhere or everywhere. It requires a peculiar borderland situated where two social classes meet. In that borderland it grows willingly. Such lands are of course to be found only where classes do meet socially. In England, for instance, classes carefully avoid meeting intimately in a social manner; although they do so frequently in a manner political, commercial and religious. Hence, *naïveté* is scarcely to be found, either in English life or in English poetry. By a parity of reasoning, American poetry, based on a life with practically no classes whatever, can boast still fewer of the blossoms of naïve types or naïve style. Arany's world, it is true, is one where the two classes, the nobleman and the peasant, do meet intimately, and



thus the flowers of *naïveté* are plentiful. It is a *naïveté* shy of display and timid; a *naïveté* in deeds more than in words; and finally, a *naïveté* of men rather than of women. It has, when enjoyed in Arany's own exquisite Magyar, a flavour so pure and hearty, so thoroughly true and poetic as to endear everything it touches. Yet it is the *naïveté* of the peasant, not of the *bourgeois*. It is poor in types, and restricted in emotions. It does not respond to the psychical atmosphere of the ever growing *bourgeois* class in Hungary, and accordingly the numerous readers of that class look for their reading somewhere else. The peasant and the rural nobleman are both captivating types for poets; they do not, however, represent more than a minor aspect of that broad humanity which has so far found its noblest expression in tales, dramas and poems grafted on events or sentiments of individuals outside the clans and septs of peasants and noblemen. The Germans, who have the excellent term of "*bürgerliches Drama*" (*bourgeois drama*), have felt that profound change coming over western literature very keenly; and the greatness of their literature is owing to that circumstance in no small degree. As in Hungary, nearly all great writers were, first magnates, and then noblemen (even Petöfi was a nobleman,

although he set no value on that fact), so in Germany all the great writers have been without an exception, "*Bürger*" (*bourgeois*) proper. Now it is the peculiar greatness of Petöfi that many of his poems appeal to the sentiments and mental attitudes of that specifically modern public, the *bourgeois* readers, with a force and sympathy as strong as is the charm of many others to the "common people" or peasants of Hungary. It is said of Pico de Mirandola that while he excited the awe and admiration of the most learned and thoughtful men at the end of the fifteenth century Rome and Florence, the maidens and young men of the beautiful city on the Arno were singing with delight his exquisite love-songs. Such is Petöfi; such is not Arany. He cannot properly be enjoyed except in his own Magyar, and by readers intimately acquainted with the two classes he belongs to. Not even when he selects, as he sometimes does, foreign subjects, as in his "*The Bards of Wales*," does he become less "clannish." Of the strongest of all feelings of young humanity, of Love, he has none but epic expression; he never wrote a love-song proper. The women in his epics are mere phantasms, angels or fiends; and his men are peasants or heroes, or both. The point on which he excels every other Hungarian poet, and on which will repose his lasting fame, is his

language. It has the raciness of the peasant's talk with the moderation of refined style. In other countries writers introduced new elements of poetic speech by means of using words or phrases taken or imitated from one of the dialects of their province or county. Even in Shakespeare there are traces of the then Warwickshire dialect, and probably still more of Warwickshire folk-lore. German writers have legitimated innumerable provincialisms. Hungarian, on the other hand, has no dialects, or none to speak of. The writer who wants to find new linguistic affluents can turn only to the stock used by the peasants in the vast plain of Hungary. Arany, replete as he was with all the wealth of the language used by the peasants, knew how to ennoble and purify the language of the farmers and shepherds of the *puszta*, and to impart to it much of that Greek simplicity and beauty of which, as a scholar, he was so competent a student. As the French language is not rich in words but in idioms, so Hungarian is not rich in words but in word-formations. Especially the verb admits of a variety of forms and terminations enveloping every shade of thought or movement with the glibness of water. It is in such linguistic feats that Arany shows his genius; and since language in Hungary has an importance tenfold more significant than in countries

composed of less polyglot peoples, it is quite natural that in the literary appreciation of Arany at the hands of Magyar critics the political element has played a very considerable part. This is, as we stated above, his great merit. Language in all modern countries has at first been the make of the peasant classes. In them there is that mysterious and instinctive power which has produced the splendid series of Romance and Teutonic languages which, by literary craft, have come to be formed into the diction of Dante, Cervantes, Molière, Shakespeare, and Goethe. Arany, in focussing this power with the strength of a mind at once *logopoeic* and richly stored with knowledge, did an inestimable service to the cause of Magyar Literature and Magyar Nationality. In that respect he occupies in Hungarian Literature a place undoubtedly higher than that of any other Magyar writer. In matter, he could not fully unite the strictly Magyar with the broader European element; in poetic language, on the other hand, he did achieve that union; and it is in that achievement of his that we must look for his specific genius and merit.

Unlike as was Arany's personality to that of Petöfi: the former modest and retiring, the latter self-assertive and dashing; their careers too were equally different from each other. Arany's life

(1817—Oct. 22nd, 1882), was one of quiet work first as a teacher, and later on (1860), as president of the Kisfaludy Society, and since 1864, as Secretary of the Academy of Science. The latter part of his life was distressed by persistent ill-health. In character Arany belonged to the select few, who have never stooped to any baseness whatever and never lost sight of the ideals of their youth. He was the intimate friend of Petöfi, who at once recognized his greatness, and the tolerant patron of the younger generation of writers. The nation mourned his death as a national calamity.

Arany is, almost exclusively, a poet of epic songs, epics proper and ballads. Of the former his most finished works are the Toldi Trilogy, consisting of "*Toldi*" (the name of the hero, published in 1847); "*Toldi szerelme*" ("The love of Toldi," published in 1879); and "*Toldi estéje*" ("The eve of Toldi," published previously in 1854). These three epics, written in rhymed six-foot stanzas of eight lines each, tell the life-story of an historic Magyar peasant-hero of the fourteenth century, in the times of King Lewis, justly called the "Great." He is of herculean strength, of violent temper, but good-hearted, simple, a loving son, and a loyal friend and subject. His struggle against his wicked brother; his love for Piroska, whom, in a passage