

**A HISTORY OF
HUNGARIAN
LITERATURE**

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A History of Hungarian Literature by Frederick Riedl

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FREDERICK RIEDL

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BY

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PREFACE

‘O mächtig ist der Trieb des Vaterlandes.’

SOME years ago, when travelling in Hungary, I paid a visit to my friend Dr. Szily, then Secretary of the Royal Hungarian Academy in Budapest, and chanced to take up a volume of Mr. Gosse's "Literatures of the World" series, published by Mr. Heinemann, which was lying on his table. "Ah," I said, "we ought to have a book like that in England about Hungarian literature. Very few of us know anything of your literature, of the fine poetry it contains, of the many features which distinguish it from other European literatures." "Well," replied Dr. Szily, "if you can get the book published in Mr. Gosse's well-known series, the Hungarian Academy shall commission the ablest exponent of Hungarian literature in Hungary to write it, and present the manuscript to you as a gift."

"Your offer is very handsome," I said, "and as soon as I get back to England, I'll ask Mr. Heinemann if he will accept it."

That is the story of the origin of this history of Hungarian literature. The publisher and the editor alike expressed their willingness to accept the generous offer of the Hungarian Academy.

The choice of the Academy finally fell on Professor Riedl, Professor of Hungarian Literature in the University of Budapest, and the author of a biography of the

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Hungarian poet, Arany, a book of remarkable power, which brought Professor Riedl into immediate prominence in his own country.

Competent translators were found in Mr. Ch. Arthur Ginever and his wife (born Ilona de Gjöry), a daughter of the Hungarian poet Gjöry, who have brought to the work all possible skill and care. I am also much indebted to Mr. and Mrs. Ginever for help and advice in translating and revising a few of the specimens of Hungarian poetry.

The book is unique in its kind in that it has been written entirely for the English public, and has never appeared in Hungarian ; indeed no such work exists in Hungary, and it will be as new to the Hungarian public as it is to the English. All honour is due to the Hungarian Academy for their generosity in thus spreading knowledge among the nations.

Hungarian literature makes, I think, special appeal to Englishmen. It is generally recognised how closely our literature is bound up with the country's religious life and political history. But in no country in the world is literature so much a part of its history, of its patriotic feelings, and of its struggles to preserve its liberties, as in Hungary. The epic and lyrical poetry, the drama, and the prose of every class, all alike sound those notes, and the melody is triumphant or despairing according to the period of the nation's history in which it was composed. Less perhaps than any other European literature has Hungarian literature been influenced by the literature of other lands. It mirrors throughout the simple, unsophisticated feelings and thoughts of men who loved their country wholly, sincerely, faithfully, and were ready to lay down their lives to preserve its freedom. Here, if ever, the soul of a people is revealed in its literature.

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My sincere thanks are due to Mr. William N. Loew of New York, and to Mr. E. D. Butler, late of the British Museum, for their kind permission to reprint some of their translations of Hungarian poems.

The unacknowledged translations, including the extracts from the "Tragedy of Man," are renderings of my own. I have also revised the whole of the translations, with a view to bringing them as closely as possible to the letter as well as to the spirit of the original.

C. HAGBERG WRIGHT.

LONDON, *April* 1906.

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