

KING STEPHAN'S OATH

(From the German of Augustus)

[The commemoration of St. Stephan is to be celebrated at Pesth, on the 20th of August, with extraordinary magnificence and solemnity. The day will be a national festival and a political demonstration. The whole of Hungary will send deputations to the *fête*. Stephan I., like our Edward the Confessor, with whom he was nearly contemporary, was both king and saint. He gave Hungary its first Great Charter; the nation's now demanding from Austria the concession of a Federal Constitution; and the people's mind reverts to St. Stephan, whose traditional fame is a rebuke to some of his successors.]

HARK! the bells of Weissenburg, ring early through the morning air;
Now the peal has sunk in silence; they have crown'd the monarch there.
See! he comes from the cathedral, bright his robes with gold and gem;
In his hand the sword of empire; on his brow the diadem.

Angels wrought that crown of splendour—so do pious legends say,—
Of the ruby's crimson'd beauty, of the diamond's starry ray;
But a sturdy smith of Doboschan, working at his daily trade,
Smote with hammer on the anvil, till he forged that battle-blade.

The long procession passeth forth, to where a gentle hill is spread,
With tapestry that bears the hues the nation loves—green, white, and red:
There the Arch-Chancellor waiteth, bearing gravely in his hand
The parchment scroll, with seal and signet: 'tis the Charter of the land.

Round him, gather'd in a circle, stand a people brave and free;
Warriors stern and bearded magistrates—all the nation's chivalry;
Bishop, priest, and mitred abbot,—ring and crozier,—all are there;
And the kingdom's standard-bearer,—broad the banner floats, and fair.

Proudly, up the hill advancing, rides the King, that nation's lord,
He turns, and o'er that silent host, he waves aloft his battle-sword;
He pauses for a minute's space, as still as marble statues stand;
Then to the vault of Heav'n he lifts, before them all, his naked hand.

"Hail, my people, hail, and listen! From my Chancellor's hand receive
The charter that your monarch gives you: 'tis a gift of love, believe;
With freeman's heart and freeman's hope, I freedom upon all bestow,
And that law to which, obedient, I, its first of subjects, bow.

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"I swear by yon eternal Heaven, that e'en in storm its blessing brings—
I swear it by my own strong heart, where, twin with wrath, affection springs;
Ne'er as a despot king to govern, but by law and right to rule;
Self-will mars the loftiest wisdom;—a law leads wisdom to a goal.

"I swear to hold this charter sacred—make its every promise true;
Ne'er to lessen, bend, or change it, or interpret it anew,
Never of the holy fabric will I touch a single stone,
Lest, so touched, the shaken structure, should be wreck'd and overthrown.

"I swear to keep unsoil'd, unstain'd, the honour of our land and race,
Bright as warrior keeps his arms, pure as priest the holy place.
A nation's wealth is of the earth, that gives it even and pours it wine;
Its honour is the azure dome, where stars in golden glory shine.

"I swear to counsel wise and just, a willing ear and heart to lend;
I ne'er will check the freeborn word, however bold the thought it send.
Not always where they most are sought, within the kingly garden's bound,
But on the wild neglected heath, the fairest flowers oft are found.

"Wisely will I use your treasure, none to waste, and much to spare;
For the widow's tear bedews it, and the peasant's toil is there.
How can king, 'mid song and feast, rejoice to see the goblet pass,
When he throws his brightest pearl—his people's love—into the glass?"

The gentle summer breeze soon fled, that heard the Monarch's oath that day,
And e'er that little group had fill'd, him centuries have roll'd away;
Those iron ranks of bearded men, the bulwarks of a nation's trust,
Are only shadows to us now; we tread, forgetful, on their dust.

But still at Ofen they preserve King Stephan's Mantle, Crown, and Sword;
Arm'd sentinel, and keeping yet, above those relics, watch and ward;
When Hungary a king means, robe, sword, and crown, are borne again,—
Alas! that Stephan's spirit, too, no watchers could on earth retain!

The people see his Mantle still—and wish his heart beneath its fold!
His Sword is saved—and, "Ah!" they sigh, "if Stephan's hand its hilt could hold!"
His Crown yet gleams—alas! the rays flash not upon a Stephan's brow;
And when his oath is sworn, we ask, "Will it be kept as truly now?"

LEWIS FILMORE.



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