Today's Geography

Little Journeys to Places Figuring in World Events

Prepared by The National Geographic Society, Washington, D. C., for Department of Interior, Bureau of Education.

WHAT CHICAGO OWES TO GEOGRAPHY

Chicago is the subject of one of a series of bulletins on American cities. The following description is based on a communication to the National Geographic society by William Joseph Showalter:

"Geography made Chicago. Its position at the foot of the Great Lakes resulted in its evolution as the farthest inland terminus of navigation of the inland seas.

"Made what it is by the processes of geography, Chicago soon returned the compliment by helping geography transform other regions. Its slaughtering and packing industry has changed the center of gravity of the meat-producing world. Its agricultural implement industry has revised the economic status of more than half of the inhabitants of the earth. Its sleeping-car industry has entirely revised the geography of travel, bringing hundreds of places separated by mountain and plain close to each other.

"It is interesting to pause for a bird's-eye inventory of what the city is today. Fourth in population, it ranks first among the world's great urban centers in many ways. No other place butchers as much meat, makes as much machinery, builds as many cars, sells as much grain, or handles as much lumber.

"The Michigan avenue improvement is a major feature of the now famous 'Chicago Plan.' The beautiful highway, with its connecting arteries, unites the North Shore with the South side. For years this thoroughfare has been the pride of Chicago, and the admiration of all who visit the city. As a part of the Lake Shore drive that links the woods of southern Wisconsin with the plains of northern Indiana, it is a magnificent street.

"To secure the full benefits of her situation, the city is undertaking to connect her three great lakeside parks. Already Lincoln park has edged a narrow way southward along the beach until there is a wonderful curving stretch of green reaching to Grand avenue and making a four-mile parkway unbroken and unmarred.

"The city annually spends five million dollars for park purposes; more per capita, perhaps, than any other city of the first order in existence. There is not a 'keep off the grass' sign in the entire park system; and all recreational facilities are free except the boats in the lagoons.

"There is a 'swimming hole' within walking distance of every boy in Chicago; and even with the fine municipal bathing beaches of the lake front not far away, these mid-city park lagoons are always in use, providing joy for the hearts of the kiddies who visit them."

MONT BLANC: APEX OF EUROPE

Mont Blanc undoubtedly remains "the apex of Europe" in spite of the loss of a part of its top in a gigantic snow and landslide as reported in press dispatches early last winter. This great mountain led its nearest European competitor for altitude—Monte Rosa—by 564 feet. Though actual measurements of the loss in height by Mont Blanc have not been reported, estimates are that it has lost only "some scores of feet," a loss which still permits it proudly to rear its head far above all other pinnacles of the earth's crust west of the Caucasus.

Summit of Mont Blanc.

Mont Blanc, the "White Mountain," is the westernmost of the great peaks that form the Pennine Alps, which include in their length of about 50 miles such well-known features as Monte Rosa, the Matterhorn, the Great St. Bernard Pass, and Mont Blanc itself. Mont Blanc lies on the border between Italy and France. About ten miles to the northeast, also on the crest of the Pennines, is the common corner of France, Italy and Switzerland. The towering White mountain is easily visible in fair weather from Geneva, seat of the League of Nations, 60 miles to the west.

Mont Blanc has been accepted as extending 15,782 feet above sea level—just 58 feet short of three miles. As a matter of fact its height has varied from time to time. The highest visible stone in the mountain was 171 feet below the top, the crest itself being made up of an unknown thickness of ice and consolidated snow. This cap becomes slightly lower in summer, due to melting, but is renewed in winter.

Partly hidden among lesser peaks and foothills, Mont Blanc was practically unknown to western Europe until 1744. At first local mountain climbers and tourists visited only the lower ends of the glaciers—among them the famous Mer de Glace—near the French village of Chamonix. For more than a quarter of a century a standing reward for anyone who would discover a route to the top, was uncollected. Finally on August 9, 1786, the crest was reached by a peasant guide, Jacques Balmat. He became more than locally famous and received the quixotic gift of a patent of nobility from the king of Sardinia.

HUNGER SUPPLANTS FETES WHERE WOMEN WORE TWENTY PETTICOATS

Budapest now is capital of a shrunken Hungary, a nation reduced to a fourth its former size, both in respect to its area and population. The famous city which first experienced anarchy and carnage during the era of Bela Kun and his communistic government, now feels the pangs of hunger, and can scarcely hope to regain its former importance, prosperity and gayety during the lifetime of its present inhabitants, if ever.

The Budapest of today offers a pathetic contrast to the care-free days of such fetes as that of St. Stephen's before the war.

That historic celebration, when men wore slit skirts and the women donned 20 petticoats, is described in the following bulletin from the National Geographic society, based on a communication from DeWitt Clinton Falls:

"For who Saint Stephen was, and why he was thus honored, we must go back some nine hundred and odd years in Hungarian history, from which we gather the following information: Vaik came to the throne of the Magyar Duchy in the year 997. He applied for and received the title of Apostolic king from Pope Sylvester II, and was crowned in Budapest in the year 1000, under the Christian name of Stephen. He did much for his countrymen to bring them into the established church, and founded throughout his kingdom churches, schools and convents. His administration was a wise one, and so firmly did he deal with the attempted uprising of the 'Old Magyar Religion' party that when his death occurred, in 1036, he left his country entirely converted to Christianity. So much had he done for the advancement of the Christian faith among the wild hordes of eastern Europe, and added to the civilization of his subjects, that he was canonized and gladly proclaimed by the Hungarians as their patron saint.

"When the Saint passed away, in 1036, one of his hands was amputated and embalmed, and this sacred relic reposes in the court chapel of the Royal Palace in old Buda. Adorned with many handsome rings, it is kept in a crystal casket, set in a beautiful golden reliquary ornamented with many precious stones. In a special shrine behind the high altar, it remained for 364 days in every year, where it could be seen only by the royal household, and those having special permission. On the three hundred and sixty-fifth day, the one set apart to do honor to Saint Stephen, it was taken from its resting place, and with great pomp and a most brilliant escort, carried in a procession to the old Matthias church for a special memorial service.

"The first thing that attracted our attention, as we drove by the walking crowds, was the change of costume of the peasants from the day before. Then all were in their working clothes, but today they were arrayed in all their glory. The men had retained their flat hats, but had generally adorned them with flying ribbons of the national colors—red, white and green. The white divided-skirt-like trousers were now ornamented on the bottoms of the legs with fringe, or coarse lace, and the dark working coats had been laid aside. In their place were gala ones, always colored—soft browns, reds and greens—and elaborately braided with different colored cords.

"The women retained the colored head handkerchiefs, but they were newer and brighter than those worn on Saturday. Their waists were generally of white or light cotton material, sometimes gaily ornamented with coarse-colored embroidery. It was the skirts that were the unique things about the costumes. Of the brightest colors, they were accordion-plaited, and stood out in the most remarkable manner. How they accomplished this was a mystery to the ladies of our party, until our trusty guide and interpreter had been interviewed. From him it was learned that no Hungarian peasant woman considers herself properly dressed for a gala occasion unless she has on at least twenty petticoats."

MOLDAVIA

Now that Roumania has doubled its area and population, thus becoming the largest of the Balkan states, it is attracting more interest and attention among nations of the world.

Moldavia, the north wing of the butterfly-shaped Roumania of pre-war days, was conspicuous during the struggle for being squeezed between the Austro-German armies on the north, and other central powers' forces attacking on the south.

Moldavia had approximately one-fourth of the population and one-fourth of the area of the Roumania of 1914. The population is a little less than two and a quarter million, and the area a little less than 15,000 square miles. To the west of it lie Transylvania and the Austrian crown lands of Bukowina. To the east lies Bessarabia, with the river Pruth marking the boundary the entire distance. On the south is Wallachia, the other wing of the Roumanian kingdom.

The Sereth river divides Moldavia into eastern and western sections, flowing the entire length of the principality along the foothills of the Carpathian mountains. Eastern Moldavia, composed mainly of the high plateau lying between the Pruth and the Sereth, is approximately 275 miles long and has an average width of about 50 miles. Western Moldavia is entirely mountainous, the crest of the Carpathians forming the boundary between it and Austria-Hungary.

The history of the principality of Moldavia is of striking interest. It was founded about the middle of the fourteenth century by the Wallach Voivode Bogden. It soon grew to be a large state, embracing the present Moldavia, Bukowina, and Bessarabia. Poland and Hungary were both rivals for favor at the Moldavian court, with neither able permanently to assert its overlordship. Stephen the Great ruled Moldavia from 1457 to 1504, and defied the Turks, winning a signal victory over them at Rakova in 1475. Gradually growing stronger, however, the Moslems succeeded again, under Stephen the Great's successor, in establishing their mastery.

Although the Turks never settled the country, they proceeded to build fortresses, and thus managed to hold their ground.

Up to 1821 the country was governed by hospodars appointed by the sultan from the families of Greek aristocrats. In that year native princes were once more made to head the government, but in 1829, Russia having gained a victory over Turkey, was accorded a protectorate over Moldavia under the treaty of Adrianople. This treaty was terminated by the Crimean war and the treaty of Paris. Thereafter, the powers agreed to set up the two principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia, which in their turn decided, in 1859-61, that they would unite under one head and become one country.

CONQUERING BUBONIC PLAGUE IN THE PHILIPPINES

Discovery last summer of a number of isolated cases of the bubonic plague in the United States lends interest to the following communication to the National Geographic society, describing how the disease was conquered by American medical authorities in the Philippines.

"The United States drove the bubonic plague out of the Philippines as completely as it swept the yellow fever out of Cuba.

"Bubonic plague was discovered at Manila December 26, 1899, and slowly but steadily increased up to December, 1901. The deaths in 1900 numbered 199, and in 1901 reached a total of 432. The disease was at its worst each year during the hot, dry months of March, April, and May, nearly or quite disappearing during September, October, November, and December. It will be noted that the number of cases in 1901 exceeded that in 1900 by 200, while the number of deaths was about two and a half times as great, and the percentage of mortality among persons attacked increased from 73.4 in 1900 to 91.7 in 1901.

"On account of the important part which house rats are known to play in the distribution of bubonic plague, a systematic campaign was inaugurated against these rodents in Manila. Policemen, sanitary inspectors, and specially appointed rat-catchers were furnished with traps and poison, and both traps and poison were distributed to private individuals under proper restrictions. A bounty was paid for all rats turned over to the health authorities, and stations were established at convenient points throughout the city where they could be received. Each rat was tagged with the street and number of the building or lot from which it came, was dropped into a strong antiseptic solution, and eventually sent to the biological laboratory, where it was subjected to a bacteriological examination for plague.

"Buildings in which plague rats were taken were treated exactly as were those where the disease attacked the human occupants. The bacteriological examination of rats enabled the board of health to follow the pest into its most secret haunts and fight it there, and was the most important factor in the winning of the great success which was ultimately achieved.

"With very few exceptions, there was no recurrence of plague in buildings which had been disinfected and renovated. As center after center of infection was found and destroyed the percentage of diseased rats begun to decrease, and in January, 1902, when, judging from the history of previous years, plague should have begun to spread among human beings, there was not a single case. In February, one case occurred. In March, there were two cases, as against 63 in March of the preceding year, and before April, the disease had completely disappeared."

A Bit of Frost.

Mable—Did Percy propose to you in flowery language?

Martha—Yes, but I nipped it in the bud.

An Insinuation.

"I would have you know, sir, that my family came of a very long line."

"Oh, I have no doubt its members had plenty of rope in their time."