

## LAND OF CHOICE

WRITTEN by a Hungarian scholar who himself passed through the vicissitudes of migration and assimilation, this timely study of the movement of Hungarians into Canada has a special value. The author, a graduate of the University of Budapest, taught social history and sociology at the universities of Budapest and Szeged, and had already written considerably on the specific sociological problems he now describes before he entered Canada as an immigrant in 1950.

On Professor Kosa's arrival in North America, his academic interest perforce became practical. Now with a broader insight into the life of the immigrant, he carried out systematic research for the Department of Citizenship and Immigration among his fellow countrymen in Canada. Taking as a sample 112 Hungarian families who had entered the country before 1939, he had a mature immigrant group. Their locale was Toronto and the tobacco district of southwestern Ontario.

This book describes the life and assimilation of these people into a new culture, the problems they faced, and the adjustments made. It will appeal to teachers and students of sociology and anthropology, to the general reader interested in the current Hungarian influx and in the growth of the Canadian community, and to Hungarians who have recently entered Canada. Both timely and scholarly, this is a detailed and careful documentation of what is happening to an important segment of Canadian society.

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THE HUNGARIANS  
IN CANADA

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*By*

John Kosa

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IN MEMORIAM  
CARISSIMAE  
MATRIS ET AVIAE MEAE

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## CHAPTER I

# INTRODUCTION

ONE OUT OF EVERY SEVEN PERSONS in Canada is an immigrant, and the difference between foreign-born and native-born is more than a matter of words. Native-born people inherited their country and own it by a right of birth. They were reared in that country and adopted its way of life through a natural course. They move in its milieu with the ease of being at home and have no special problems of how to be a Canadian. For the immigrant, however, Canada is a land of choice. He selected it because life in the old country was poor, and sometimes intolerable, while Canada offered better opportunities, greater freedom or a more promising future. He selected Canada out of free will; yet it was difficult to renounce his old country.

The immigrant, walking ashore at Halifax or Montreal, brought with him not only the bundles of his material possessions, but also the culture of his native country—its language, its customs of family life, clothing, housing, cooking, and working. When disembarking, he found a strange, sometimes even frightening land where the culture of the old country could not be used. The land of choice offered bright chances, but posed high requirements. The immigrant had to establish a new existence, find a gratifying job, build up a home, found a family. Furthermore, he had to adopt the culture of the new country, its language, customs, way of life. He faced a difficult personal problem. He had to work and to adjust himself since only adjustment opened up the new country.

The land of choice presented a bold challenge, and the usual responses the immigrants gave to this challenge were adjustment and assimilation. Nevertheless, people responded in their own ways. Some immigrants overcame the personal difficulties with a rare talent, and earned public praise for their extraordinary success. Others succumbed to the difficulties, failed to adjust, and left the country in disappointment. The majority, however, fell somewhere between the two extremes. The average immigrant established himself, became Canadianized, and his personal fate melted into that of the average Canadians. This was a slow process of subtle changes, a matter of

many years, or a man's life. It manifested itself in the small details of daily life so gradually that not even the immigrant, immersed as he was in his regular routine, noticed it. However, if a cross-section of the immigrants is taken, and their fortunes are examined over a long period, the changes stand out conspicuously. The present study aims to trace the changes of adjustment within a group of Hungarian immigrants in Canada.

Hungarians are one of the "small peoples" of central Europe, numbering between ten and twelve millions. Among the ethnic groups of America, too, they form but a small group. In the United States in 1950 the "Hungarian stock" (comprising the foreign-born and the native-born of foreign or mixed parentage) counted 705,102, less than one-half of one per cent of the population. Such a figure, however, includes a certain number of people whose ties with anything Hungarian are either weak or no longer existent. In Canada, the census of 1951 found 60,460 residents of Hungarian origin. The figure, which includes Canadian-born descendants of Hungarian immigrants, represented less than one-half of one per cent of the Canadian population.

Hungarian immigrants began to arrive in Canada in the 1880's when the Prairies were opened up and the Dominion initiated a new, vigorous immigration policy. They settled mainly on the homesteads of the Prairies, particularly in the present Province of Saskatchewan, but they were few in number as long as the door to the United States stood open. In 1911 there were fewer than 10,000 in Canada.<sup>1</sup> World War I interrupted European immigration, and when it was resumed after the war it showed many new patterns. The United States restricted immigration, and the small quota allotted to the Hungarians practically barred them. Now Canada became the most important destination of Hungarian migrants, with Latin America and France following her in importance. In the decade 1921-30, 28,000 Hungarians came to Canada, and their number would have been greater had the Hungarian government not imposed severe restrictions upon emigration. Immigrants of this second wave, instead of going west, settled in the industrial areas of eastern Canada, particularly in Ontario, which now became the centre of Canadian Hungarians. There, as Table I shows, their number grew steadily, although the depression slowed down the influx of newcomers. World War II brought it to a standstill, and when peace was restored, a new wandering of peoples began.

<sup>1</sup>The Canadian census of 1901 and 1911 enumerated the Hungarians together with Lithuanians and Moravians, and the two latter groups cannot be subtracted now. Accurate data on the number of Hungarians are available only from 1921 on.