

**SPECIAL SECTION**

**Toldi**

**An Epic Poem (1846)**

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(continued from Vol. IV, No. 2)

## CANTO EIGHT

“The monarch thought it pitiful indeed  
That Nicholas, kept at home, belied his breed.”

— Ilosvai

Meanwhile George Toldi had devised a scheme  
(If I may set some order on my theme),  
Devised a scheme, I say, contrived a plan  
His younger brother's fortunes to unman.

Therefore in haste to Buda did he fling,  
To dig a pit and trap him with the King.  
He sought the latter out, his greetings bade,  
And started in about the hapless lad:

“Your Majesty, I find it bitterness  
To tell you what I must, in due duress;  
Bitter it is, for blood can be no other;  
For sure, a younger brother is a brother.”

He left off here, as if in utter grief.  
And pressed his eyelids with a handkerchief;  
From being rubbed, his eyes quite red might be,  
But not a teardrop could the monarch see.

Then the King spoke discreetly to the other:  
“I never heard you had a younger brother.  
Why have you never brought him to my court  
To introduce him here in seemly sort?”

And George replied: “My Master and my King,  
Great shame and grief to me the affair would bring.  
But (and he fetched a deep sigh on this ‘But’)  
My brother from your favour would be shut.

“When Nicholas was but ten, our father died,  
And he was left an orphan by my side.  
I sought to act the father, as was right,  
And bring him up to be a worthy knight.

But he turned out a rake, and dull for sure;  
So he stayed home, a bounder and a boor,  
Though he was of incomparable strength.  
But what's the use, when folly rules at length?”

The good King answered: "Why, a fearful pity!  
Yet you were wrong to keep him from the city.  
You speak of powers in his thews uniting.  
I wonder if he has a mind for fighting.

But what is past does not from interest free him.  
Bring him to me, I pray, that I may see him!  
He'll learn the art of warfare in my school,  
And be a common soldier if a fool."

— "Thanks, many thanks, for all your kindness, Sire!  
And for my brother your esteemed desire;  
Alas, it is too late, the lad is lost,  
Having committed murder, to his cost!

Alack, that I must utter such a charge!  
He killed a servant, and is still at large."  
George sank, with groans, upon a statue's base.  
The King grew grave, to watch his lying face.

Why the King put on such a serious mask  
He did not tell, nor did the other ask.  
Thereafter, for a long time, neither spoke;  
Then the King's Majesty the silence broke:

"There's still a way my pardon to obtain:  
Here let him hasten in, with might and main.  
Upon a Danube isle a great Czech fights  
And has already slain my bravest knights.

"Here let your brother come with valiant breath:  
Either he'll beat him, or will meet his death.  
If he should win, with pardon he goes hence;  
If not, he shall have doom for his offence."

So spoke the King, but not to George's relish,  
For the kind brother sighed with malice hellish:  
"Why, even this solution comes too late.  
He roams the country in an outlaw's state.

I don't know where he is, for secretly  
He slipped from home and took no leave of me.  
Far off, upon an unknown track he sped;  
God only knows if he be live or dead."

Thus George lamented with perfidious art,

False to the very centre of his heart.  
Nor did he scorn his real aim to betray  
And turned his discourse still another way.

“My brother’s done for, by all human law;  
His rightful heir am I, without a flaw.  
I could take over, with presumptive claim,  
If I were minded to pursue that aim;

    But some, perhaps, might afterwards declare  
I had been hankering for Nicholas’ share,  
That having chased him out with harsh command,  
I came back home and took away his land.

“But God forbid that I should be his heir  
And add the people’s slander to my share.  
And who could guarantee he might not come  
And kill me for the estate I barred him from?

    I don’t want that; the title I disown,  
And lay it at the footstool of your throne.  
You’ll know some worthy man, of gentle station,  
To whom to give it as a royal donation.”

So spoke George Toldi, with obeisance deep;  
But the King’s thoughtful mind was not asleep.  
With perfect ease the dark intent he found  
That George had covered up without a sound, —

    To get a Royal grant, without a doubt,  
More easily to drive his brother out,  
If Nicholas should be cleared, by any chance,  
And come to claim his true inheritance.

The King caught Toldi with a chilly smile,  
By his own words, in colloquy of guile:  
“Well, I accept your brother’s property.

    Since you most worthy of the grant must be,  
    I’ll make it yours, if you in single fight  
Tomorrow kill the Czech, that fearful knight,  
And pin his head upon this battlement.  
That action wins my seal and royal assent!”

Red as a parboiled shrimp turned Toldi's face;  
The day was bright, but shadows filled the place;  
The statues danced about him for a spell;  
Giddiness seized him and he almost fell;  
    He sweated, yet his body felt a chill;  
His face turned pale, as if surpassing ill;  
His blood-stream would not service, most and least,  
One sole mosquito for a single feast.

At last he started speaking for the nonce  
And sadly to the King's words made response:  
"My brother's lot, I said, is not my goal.  
I turn it down, lest it oppress my soul."  
    He spoke, and bowing to the King with care,  
Went home, and started in to tear his hair  
And beat his brows: his servants stood behind him  
And darkly wondered if they ought to bind him.

## CANTO NINE

"The tether broke, the bull went running wild. . .  
They threw the lad some liver as they smiled."  
    — Illosvai

The moon shone brightly on the streets of Pest  
And all the chimneys with its radiance dressed.  
Brown shingle-roofs cringed humbly lower down  
And covered half the house-walls of the town.  
    You'd think most people high in attics dwelt,  
And therefore garret upon garret knelt;  
To-day the storeys stand up, wall on wall,  
But then the double-roofs soared high and tall.

Weary of wandering without aught to eat,  
Young Nicholas sought a bench beside the street;  
The gentlefolk strolled by him, fair to view;  
He gazed at them until he weary grew.  
    He bent his head; his fortunes seemed to mock it,  
With not a farthing in his empty pocket.

For four long days he'd eaten not a thing  
But mushrooms, picked up in his wandering.

A sudden noise broke out and shrieks rose higher.  
Was there a siege, a flood, perhaps a fire?  
There was no fire, nor siege, nor yet a flood;  
Yet peril now drew nigh with thundering thud:

    A great, wild bull ran down the narrow street,  
Loose from a slaughter-house in frenzied heat;  
His roars and bellows the dark blood protest  
That from his ear was trickling down his breast.

Each butcher's helper bore a length of rope,  
But ran to safety in a craven lope;  
Each sought protection for his own dear hide  
Yet from his corner to the dogs he cried.

    Six mighty mastiffs there proved dutiful  
As the men set them on the frantic bull;  
The dogs then plied their task, devoid of fears,  
In going for his withers and his ears.

Whenever dogs, in rushing to and fro,  
Bit the bull's ears and caused him bitter woe,  
The bull would roar and shake the mastiff free  
Thus flinging off his "ear-rings" misery.

    The dogs were scattered in a snarling clump,  
And fell against the house-walls with a thump.  
Should any ear-shred in their mouths remain,  
They chewed it spitefully in rage and pain.

The butchers' helpers kept on shouting "Catch him!"  
But as the mad beast wheeled, they could not match him;  
Those dogs, indeed, who ventured close to fight,  
His horns tossed upwards, in an unbought flight.

    In a nearby courtyard, one of them lay spattered;  
Another's bowels by his horns were scattered;  
The butchers' lads — what else could they have said? —  
Kept urging still the dogs who now were dead.

But the bull bellowed like a thunderstorm;  
And sweeping from his path the human swarm,

He charged at all he met, with snorting breath;  
Everyone ran away, to shun sure death.

The women screamed to heaven in their despair;  
The men yelled "Stop him!" but not one man there  
Would seek to check the bull, with dauntless soul;  
Each would have hidden in a gimlet-hole.

Young Toldi did not run; he left his seat  
And waited in the middle of the street.  
"What are you up to, lad? Does madness stun you?  
A furious bull is bearing down upon you!"

He saw him well enough. How should he not?  
"Why, let them shout!" he murmured. And I wot  
He judged their words inept and fanciful,  
For first of all, he had to mind the bull.

The latter, at this adversary found,  
Gave a tremendous roar and pawed the ground.  
His horns threw up the dust, as chaff might soar  
In forking straw upon a threshing-floor.

Then, as he tensed the muscles of his back,  
He lowered his great horns for the attack.  
"He's lost! Ai, ai!" the people shrieked distressed  
From every window of that street in Pest.

He lost? Not he! Stamping defiance stout,  
With his tremendous voice he gave a shout.  
By this device he gave the bull a fright —  
Then by his two great horns he held him tight;  
By those same horns he dragged him to his pen.

He asked assistance from the butchers' men;  
But it was long before they dared appear,  
Bringing strong ropes and poles and other gear.

To a great beam the captive bull they tied,  
His horns strapped to his legs on either side;  
The crowd dispersed; and to a nearby shed  
The butchers' men retired and went to bed.

Nicholas sat down beside the abattoir,  
And sought with sleep his body to restore;  
Beneath his head a rafter is his pillow;  
And moonlight blankets all his form embillow.

But butchers turned him out from this retreat,  
Cast a big chunk of liver at his feet  
And told him, in a manner far from civil,  
To clear right out and hasten to the devil.

“For having saved the people by the score,  
Shall liver be my pay, and nothing more?”  
— Thought Toldi, and he let the liver lie;  
Nay, gave it to a dog that wandered by.

He sought the street. His ears a whisper caught:  
“This was the man who with the mad bull fought.”  
And many a human face he saw, alack,  
That from a window or a door drew back.

Then window-shutters closed, all down the block,  
And creaking keys were turned in many a lock.  
Silence set in, cold to the human race.  
“Where shall I find,” said he, “a fireplace?”

How many things there were that crossed his mind!  
His mother’s image hovered, sweet and kind,  
Looking as when he went to say Farewell;  
Her embrace and kiss within his memory dwell.

That night had been of just as soft a tone,  
The moon above them just as brightly shone.  
Then, too, had all men shut him starkly out,  
And shelter for the night was all in doubt.

Forsaking for a while his mother’s face,  
His thoughts turned to the widowed lady’s grace!  
How she had wept, how she had wrung her hands,  
Since her sons’ blood had stained the island’s sands!

His vow came to his mind. What was his plan? —  
“How can I fight tomorrow with that man?  
Where can I come by buckler, mail and sword?  
And will the Czech accept my warlike word?

“Perhaps he will not heed me, when he eyes me,  
Will laugh and scoff at me, and will despise me.  
Perhaps men will not even let me near:  
‘Be off, you scamp!’ They’ll say, when I appear.”

Nicholas with such dark thoughts could not compete;



Heaving deep sighs, he roamed about the street.  
Sometimes he paused, and gazed upon the ground,  
As if some precious thing might there be found.

Then he looked up, and brightness filled his face;  
You'd think he ran, so speedy was his pace.  
He sought the cemetery, fresh and green,  
Where he the mourning widow late had seen:  
"With ease I'll hit the mark at which I aim.  
Surely her sons had war-gear for their game.  
I'll put that on." He felt a flush of joy —  
That bitter disappointment would destroy.

For vainly did he search the graveyard o'er:  
He found no living soul there any more;  
Where should he find the widow's place of rest?  
A hundred thousand lived in Budapest.

He knew at last his good intent was shaken,  
That his strong vow was to no purpose taken,  
That he was but a toy, and at its whim  
Fate, like a child, had only played with him.

And since the living would not give him aid,  
He went to rest where the cold dead were laid;  
The funeral mound was wet with tears of dew  
Which the cold night had wept in sorrow true.

Nicholas looked up, to view the Milky Way,  
And grieved that as an outlaw he must stray;  
While like a bird, that on far flight would start,  
Hope fluttered in his dark, despondent heart.

## CANTO TEN

"George Toldi's mother bade the servant speed  
And give the bread to Nicholas in his need."

— Ilosvai

Capricious Hope, whose total lack of care  
Had driven hapless Nicholas to despair,

Sent sleep to soothe his eyes and dreams to bless  
His spirit in its deep unhappiness.

The Czech's defeat these charming visions bring,  
And pardon, for his murder, from the king.  
His hands held costly weapons, pearl-beset;  
With tears of joy his mother's eyes were wet.

The sudden thud of hoof-beats broke his rest;  
Toldi looked up; moonbeams the night invest,  
Helping his view, and close at hand it showed —  
A rider past the cemetery rode.

Who was the horseman? Past all hope, of course,  
He recognized old Ben upon the horse:  
"Hello! Who's there? Old Ben, can it be you?  
Oh, what a priceless chance, if this be true!"

In vain the old retainer would have said  
He was not Ben, but someone else instead;  
For Nicholas dragged him from his saddle's base  
And kissed away all dust-specks from his face.

The only sense to Ben that all this gave  
Was that a ghost had seized him from the grave;  
And Nicholas had to make a long oration  
Before the old man grasped the situation.

But when he caught the meaning of it all,  
That moment till his death he could recall,  
The good soul so remembered his great fright  
And then the mighty sequel of delight;

He hardly could believe his own two eyes  
And touched his bones, his senses to apprise;  
Then from his eyes the tears poured out in crowds,  
Like showers of rain from one of God's own clouds.

The joy and lamentation lasted long.  
For Nicholas had to tell his tale of wrong;  
Yet pauses in the telling brought another  
Concern of his, the welfare of his mother:

"How is she then? I hope she is not ill.  
And is she sorry for her lost child still?  
Did George stay on, and does he riot gladly? —  
For surely he would treat poor Mother badly!"

Then cheerfully old Ben to Nicholas spake:  
He need not sorrow for his mother's sake  
George left next day, and gave that much relief,  
Nor was her spirit agonized by grief.

A glimpse of Nicholas was her dream of mirth —  
If Ben could find him on this whole broad earth,  
She promised faithfully to come and meet him,  
Even if fifty miles she walked to greet him.

“Nor did she, my dear Nicholas, send me out  
Merely to find you, but without a doubt  
To stay with you as faithful aide and valet  
And even, at need, in your defence to rally.

Where'er you turn, I shall be at your side,  
And help to you in danger shall provide . . . .”  
All this was said by Ben, and many times  
As much as anyone could put in rhymes.

There for the night they purposed to remain.  
Ben gave his horse a good repast of grain,  
For oats and bread alike the pommel bore —  
Of shame for such a load he kept no store.

It also bore a satchel from the farm,  
And in this, elbow-deep, he thrust his arm,  
And drew out something, saying: “Here you are,  
A loaf of bread from home you'll not debar.

“Your lady mother had this wheat-bread planned,  
Kneading and baking it with her own hand;  
And I to strict instructions must submit,  
To hand it to you without cutting it.”

He gave him loaf and breadknife in due course,  
And Nicholas tried to cut with all his force.  
But it was not the loaf that gave and broke —  
The strong knife shattered at the lusty stroke.

The old man wondered: “In the devil's name,  
Was it through wind the bread thus dry became,  
Stored in the double folds of the valise?”

He took the knife and fitted piece to piece  
And thought: “How nice if I could this repair!”

While Nicholas almost melted in despair,  
Fearing to starve while bread his hopes impel,  
When lo, a piece of iron from it fell.

Ben picked it up and found, in paradox,  
It was not just some iron, but a box.  
He opened it — no lock its contents pent —  
And gazed inside it with astonishment.

Coined gold lay there, not two or three small doits,  
But all through life and all of his exploits  
(Not even food had given him such pleasure),  
He never had beheld so large a treasure.

Was Nicholas at this fortune not delighted?  
Of course he was, abundantly excited;  
He danced for joy at his release from sorrow,  
And pondered much his projects for tomorrow:

How he'll buy weapons! How well-dressed will tread!  
How he'll cut off that Czech's defiant head!  
And how of this and that? In fact, it seems  
There was no limit to his glorious dreams!

When they had both gazed long, in pleasure sunny,  
They sat down on a grave to count the money;  
Then Nicholas, one by one, takes out the coins,  
And Ben his two old hands together joins.

Said he: "Old palm, you've surely struck it rich!  
Today you really could afford to itch!  
But hush, I must not speak and spoil the count!"  
But no, an even hundred was the amount.

"Now listen to my words, good servant mine:  
Put carefully away these ninety-nine;  
The hundredth we'll dispose of easily,  
For I'm in famous spirits for a spree!"

Old Ben at such proposals might have cavilled,  
But his own flask had dried out as he travelled.  
The outside had been moistened by the dew,  
But dry inside, it could strike sparks for you.

Not far they hunted on the roads around,  
For near at hand a poorish pub they found.  
Dirty and shabby was that ancient inn;  
On the Hortobágy it could indeed have been.

A melancholy well-sweep stood in front;  
Ben tethered here the charger, with a grunt;  
Nicholas went in; in darkness did he tread,  
And on the lintel low he hurt his head.

“Innkeeper, hey! Where are you? Devil take you!  
Are you asleep or dead? A light! Awake you!”—  
“Oh, I’m awake! (Whom has the storm blown here?)  
Here’s light, and wine! How much would make good cheer?”—

“Nor cup nor pint could satisfy a man.  
Just give us nothing or the whole damned can!”  
The landlord cleared his throat. (“Aha,” he thought,  
“Tonight a mighty drinker I have caught!” )

Ben in the meantime brought the knapsack in,  
And welcome to the lad it must have been:  
He gulped provisions down, with such a feat  
Three men would not be able to compete.

The big can came. He rolled his shirt-sleeves high,  
As if a wrestling-match he could espy;  
Then down his gullet half the tankard sped.  
Quoth Ben: “Good heavens! It will turn your head.” —

“Head or no head, I don’t care very much.  
What’s your concern, how large a can I clutch?  
If you are glad, a burden is’t to think.  
Bury your reason. Here is wine. Now, drink!”

So saying, he transferred the can to Ben,  
Whose old hands shook, again and yet again;  
Nor had he nerve the tankard high to tip —  
He counted secretly his every sip.

While at the board their laughter was resounding,  
Beside the stove a cymbal started sounding;  
There in the nook lay an old cymbalist,

Who woke, the guests with music to assist.

Then Toldi took the tankard in his hands;  
Ready to dance, upon the floor he stands.  
He drank, and danced, and made the whole house shake,  
While Ben kept saying: "Stop, for mercy's sake!" —

"Whether it hurts or not, I will not stop!" —  
He drained the tankard to its final drop. —  
"Leave sorrow to your horse! Its head is big.  
Not for long years have I had such a jig.

Tapster, a can for me! And for my man  
A cupful, for he cannot hold the can."  
The landlord promptly served the liquor up.  
The lad drank deep, while Ben sipped from his cup.

"Hurrah, I say! Grief to the grave consign!  
Our landlord's sleepy. Let us drink his wine!  
Drink, cymbalist! Or else on you I'll throw it." —  
"In me, not on me, Sir, I pray, bestow it." —

"Drink from your own for love! Tapster, d'ye hear me?  
At least pretend to drink, or else you jeer me.  
If more you cannot swallow, by my star,  
May the earth drink the rest. Ah, there you are!"

He poured the wine out on the tavern floor;  
Ben shook his head, this folly to deplore.  
But Toldi went on dancing, full of steam,  
And heaved his head up to the girder-beam.

In bursts of joy, he'd give a mighty roar,  
Then drank, then danced, then drank his fill once more,  
But his old pal forbore, and from his cup  
Only by small sips drank his liquor up.

At last old Ben was still, and ceased to frown.  
His head grew heavy and sank slowly down.  
The big stove slipped away; and from his seat  
The old man fell in weariness complete.  
Through Toldi's frame a like exhaustion spread:  
He sat, and on his arms he laid his head  
(Bare arms they were, on which great veins deploy);  
So fell asleep, so slept, the mighty boy.

## CANTO ELEVEN

“One of us two today will die, you’ll note.  
A dead man surely does not need a boat.”

— Ilosvai

Dawn donned a red cape in its proud ascent,  
And with it covered half the firmament;  
But in its velvets it was not too vain  
To peer in through a broken window-pane  
    Into the bare old inn; it only noted  
The cymbalist asleep; outside, devoted  
Old Ben was working in the morning hush,  
Busy attending to the charger “Thrush.”

The dawn then looked on Buda and on Pest;  
Its own face in the Danube it addressed:  
Red turned the river then, a-foam and brimming,  
And near the middle was a brown boat swimming.

    None else than Toldi was the oarsman there,  
Making wide ripples on the river fair;  
His oars the Danube with fine drops bedower,  
As if red pearls were falling in a shower.

Swift was his course; it was not long before  
He moored his wherry on the farther shore,  
Then disembarked and went with eager speed  
In quest of all of which he stood in need —  
Gilt weapons for himself, and suits of plush,  
And gay new harness for his good steed, “Thrush”;  
Since “Thrush” at home his favorite horse had been  
Old Ben had brought him for his paladin.

A wished-for shield he purchased, broad and fair;  
The tailor on his coat no spot left bare,  
But dressed it, every whit, with golden braid;  
Armor he bought, a mace with handspikes made,

    A sword and javelins of high renown,  
Made by the finest armourer in the town;  
Fringed gold and silver to his harness cling —  
What did he buy? He bought just everything.

Back at the inn, in brilliant style he stands  
And whirls the mighty mace in mighty hands.  
As the sun rose above the eastern rim,  
Its eyes were drawn by the array of him.

“Thrush” from last night was changed in every way;  
Then mud and dust had turned his coat to grey,  
Now black he was, black as a beetle rare,  
And glittering sunbeams glanced along his hair.

And when they put his stylish harness on,  
How well it fitted him, and how it shone!  
When Toldi mounted, in his elegance,  
The steed looked proudly and began to prance.

Then like the wind, at such a moment freed,  
The horse took Toldi off at topmost speed.  
Ben followed him, a teardrop in his eye,  
Because his master had not said Good-by.

Meantime, on Buda's bank, pray, what befell?  
That also, if you listen, I shall tell.  
There men the monarch's royal tent had pitched;  
Of pure blue silk its awning had been stitched,  
And dangling down, its beauty to assist,  
Were golden tassels bigger than my fist.  
Though tents of nobles all about it thronged,  
You'd know that lodging to the King belonged.

Upholstered couches, spread with wealth untold,  
Embroidered velvet and most glorious gold,  
Within the tent in beauty were arrayed —  
A fairer spectacle was never made.

Set in the middle stood an old arm-chair,  
Fully adorned with gems in brilliance rare;  
Its feet with golden clutches clawed the ground  
Where rugs of silken tapestry were found.

Around the tents a barrier was built —  
No boor might pass it with his blood unspilt —  
And there armed soldiers and a crowd immense  
Were gazing keenly at the empty tents.



Down to the Danube's edge the barrier stretched;  
Within, an empty space was plainly sketched,  
So wide, it could a cattle-mart have been  
Had men but let the cattle come therein.

Down on the bank, a mighty flag flapped high;  
Tied to its pole, a gay boat floated nigh;  
Across the stream at Pest, the same things show —  
There is a flag above, a boat below.

The river seemed a broad street, fenced with folk;  
In mid-stream stretched the island, no mere joke  
But murderous: for a week its thirsty beach  
Had lived on blood like some blood-sucking leech.

Then down from Buda's castle came the Czech,  
Making his big horse dance and toss its neck;  
The tide of his abuse in torrents swept,  
Since none was there his challenge to accept.

But suddenly, upon the bank at Pest,  
A throb of hope is pulsing in each breast:  
An unknown champion on a coal-black steed  
Announces he is ready for the deed.

His helmet's front was lowered altogether;  
Above it fluttered high a gay blue feather.  
Toldi (he was the knight) the feather took  
And gave it to the heralds. All men look

While they, as was their duty, sought the bank  
Where the big Czech in all his insults, stank.  
His plume was pink; this he for Toldi's changed, —  
A sign that single combat was arranged.

Swift runners told the matter to the King,  
Who came, and many lords with him did bring,  
While the two champions each set out by boat  
And quickly to the place of battle float.

Nicholas had hardly landed, when he gave  
His boat a push upon the Danube's wave;  
As if it skated on the river's crest,  
It bore its prow into the bank at Pest.

The Czech knight asked the reason for the act.  
Said Nicholas: "I have done it, since in fact  
A single boat is all that one man needs  
And one of us must die in this day's deeds.

A dead man in a boat takes no delight.  
The feather that I chose is blue, not white."  
So answered Toldi, and with earnest steven  
He sent a fervent prayer to God in Heaven.

Then said he: "Knight, let us shake hands adieu:  
You never harmed me, nor did I hurt you!  
Even if wroth, you've not one hour to live;  
And on his deathbed, who would not forgive?"

The Czech his mail-clad fingers did expand,  
Meaning to crush to pulp young Nicholas' hand;  
But Nicholas was aware of his intent,  
And sought that loving gesture to prevent.

Gathering fully his enormous might,  
He squeezed with power the fingers of the knight;  
The latter's glove gave way, of form bereft,  
And all the fingers of the Czech were cleft.

As when in springtime, as the sun is felt,  
The icicles on houses start to melt,  
So blood from every finger dripped away.  
The Czech at Toldi's strength knew dark dismay.

Then Toldi with his bare hands seized the Czech  
And shook him by the ankle and the neck.  
He cracked in Toldi's hands, he seemed to melt,  
And presently for Toldi's grace he knelt:

"I beg you, my dear son, don't seek my death!  
I offer you with this, my failing breath,  
All I possess, twelve vassal knights to boot,  
A nobleman, your fortunes I'll recruit!"

The heart of Toldi softened at this plea:  
"Let all be as you offer it," said he.  
"I take your wealth, but take it for another:  
You've killed two knights, I'll give it to their mother.

For charity, I give you back your life,

But you must promise, without doubt or strife,  
That though the sea engulf your fatherland,  
Again on Magyar soil you'll never stand."

The champion, in his terror, gave assent,  
And so together to the boat they went.  
But suddenly the big Czech, base of mind,  
Sought falsely to stab Nicholas from behind.

Toldi perceived it, mirrored in the stream,  
And caught the fellow's hand with strength supreme.  
The Czech knelt down again: "Have mercy, pray!" —  
"Go, ask it now from God! I'll show the way!"

Then with the sword, wrenched from the treacherous Czech,  
He gave him grace by cutting through his neck.  
The mighty sword turned scarlet with the gore;  
Then on the sword-point high the head he bore.

Tumult arose on both the river's banks;  
Men roared, waved flags, applauded in their thanks;  
The Magyars yelled as though their lungs would crack,  
And the high hills of Buda echoed back.

## CANTO TWELVE

"The King calls him to court, and there endorses  
Allowances to feed a dozen horses."

— Illosvai

When Toldi's fingers gave his foeman hell  
And down upon his knees the Czech knight fell,  
His majesty rejoiced in glad surprise.  
And tears of joy came welling in his eyes.

Then to his lords he spoke, all far from sorrow:  
"That Czech, it seems to me, won't fight tomorrow;  
Now he has met his match, who'll teach him plain  
Not to curse Magyars in this place again.

"Who may our champion be? George Toldi, say!  
In vain I've scanned his size and style today.

There are no knights who in my country dwell  
Whom I don't know, whose names I cannot tell.

But such great strength as in this knight I scan  
I never saw in any living man.

I fear he won't be Magyar, and 'twere shame  
If other folk must guard our nation's fame.

Whate'er he is, Hungarian or German,  
He's saved the Magyar land from dreadful vermin;  
On him a lapsed estate I shall confer,  
George Toldi's brother's, the young murderer."

On hearing this, George Toldi's cares were stirred;  
He looked around to see if others heard,  
And saw them smile in joy to one another  
That he should have a murderer as his brother.

When Nicholas now had cut the Czech in two  
And lifted up the head for all to view,  
The King gave orders for this paladin  
That twelve gilt-coated knights should bring him in.

These men departed on a flag-decked barge  
And brought him to the Monarch in their charge.  
The King said: "Raise your visor, with good grace.  
Tell us your name, and show your knightly face!"  
Then Nicholas fell before his Monarch's feet,  
And said: "Alas, an outlaw you must greet.  
How such I came to be, the Lord can tell,  
Nor do I know how I to murder fell

Nor why my brother turned me out of doors  
To where the angry tempest raves and pours;  
And now I come my misdeeds to lament  
And wait for pardon or for punishment."

Frankly he spoke to him who ruled the realm,  
And then pushed up the visor of his helm.  
His face is pale and then to pink it burns  
As grief and joy flood over it by turns.

The King was pleased to see his fair young face,  
And therefore questioned him with friendly grace:  
"Are you not Lawrence Toldi's younger son?"  
And Nicholas bowed assent when he was done.

At this the King addressed his gentlefolk  
And in a speech as follows to them spoke:  
“Gentles, brave knights, pray hearken and draw near,  
Because it is no trifle you will hear:

    This valiant youth is George’s younger brother,  
And George has dug a pit, the lad to smother,  
To bar his brother from their joint estate,  
Proscribed by all the family in their hate.

“I know his tricks; I’ve searched the matter out.  
I tell him to his face, past any doubt:  
A peasant he would make the lad at length  
Through jealousy of his enormous strength,  
    Lest mighty Nicholas should achieve great fame  
And overshadow his own paltry name.  
I’ll not go on — his bad soul only knows  
The reason for the hatred that he shows.

“I’ve found that it was he, some days ago,  
Provoked the lad a mighty stone to throw;  
His servants have confessed how George had planned  
To kill his brother with a hunting band.

    Is that not true, George Toldi? That is true.  
A King must know what all his subjects do.  
Who on a brother would such slander cast,  
A brother marked for fame by strength so vast?”

The Monarch’s speech met universal praise,  
Especially for the wisdom of his ways.  
George Toldi hung his head, so shamed in soul  
He could have hidden in a rabbit-hole.

    The King to Nicholas then his eyes transferred,  
Patting his shoulders with a gentle word:  
“Rise up, my gallant brave! Though once your clever  
Old brother sold you, that is done forever!

“Lo, I forgive you, as your earthly King!  
Pray God as well for His high pardoning.  
Enjoy possession of your lands in peace,  
As they from let and hindrance find release.

    Since time began, they’ve had no better master.

And since a grudging neighbour brings disaster  
Your elder brother, of his own free will,  
Gives you his share, true justice to fulfill.

“Should not, George Toldi, this to Nicholas go?”  
George stood and gaped. He did not dare say No.  
For the King’s brow grew dark, his eyes flashed fire.  
“Good,” said the King, “This too is your desire,  
I’ll have you this same day, to serve my need,  
Confirm the transfer with a formal deed.  
And since your nature foul I see too plain,  
I will not have you at my court again!”

Then Nicholas spoke: “My King, most kind to me,  
I do not crave my brother’s property,  
Nor yet my own. Brother, I give it you!  
So let your stingy heart’s desire come true!  
Rather, my King, this thing I covet most —  
Accept me as a private in your host!  
God is most merciful, a gracious Lord:  
He’ll let me make my living with my sword.”

The great King answered: “Don’t be such a child.  
Why a mere private should I have you styled?  
I shall enroll you in my Household Forces:  
Henceforth you’ll get allowance for twelve horses.”  
So saying, from his waist he did untie  
A mighty sword, gorgeous and coloured high;  
Adorned with diamonds was the sheath of gold.  
“Buckle it on,” said he, “to have and hold.”

Nothing the King could offer to the boy  
Could give the heart of Toldi greater joy.  
No wealth on earth could tempt his spirit pious,  
Not ev’n the treasure of old King Darius.  
To thank the King with words his soul was stung,  
But they were slow in coming to his tongue;  
Nor from him did the King seek courtiers’ arts,  
For well he knew how mute are honest hearts.

That Nicholas' joy might not be incomplete,  
That all he dreamed of might his longings greet,  
As in another dream his mother dear  
Approached him, from the barrier drawing near.  
Forgetting everything, he ran to meet her;  
Within his steel-clad arms he did entreat her.  
But neither of them spoke, nor laughed, nor cried;  
Only old Ben his teardrops could not hide.

At last the joy that on their spirits lay  
Into a heavy rain-cloud made its way  
And tears fell in a tempest from their eyes.  
Then to his mother's lips these words arise:  
"My gallant darling boy, my prince of men,  
How glad I am to see your face again!  
How fine you look, how well that air befits you!  
As made for soldiering the world admits you."

Said Nicholas: "Had you not my prophecy  
That, soon or late, a soldier I would be?  
Not by my strength have I this pathway trod  
But through the gracious clemency of God.  
We'll interchange with George my life's career:  
He'll go to Nagyfalú, while we live here.  
Perhaps he will grow friendlier, as time flies;  
If not, let him be jealous till he dies."

Great was the love the hero bore his mother;  
The shafts of Cupid drove him to no other —  
No love of woman touched him anyhow,  
And never did he voice a marriage vow.  
A god of war he was, through battles borne;  
Foes fell before him like ripe ears of corn.  
King, country and the weak all praised his prime —  
His exploits stud the annals of his time.

No warrior with his anger could contend;  
He'd gladly give his shirt to help a friend;  
And when the country had no foes to fight,

With jolly fellows he would find delight.

No cattle, land or gold he left, perchance;

No children fought o'er his inheritance;

But as a finer crown of his endeavor,

His fame has lasted and will last for ever.



## BOOK REVIEWS

*Louis Kossuth and Young America: A Study of Sectionalism and Foreign Policy, 1848-1852.* By Donald S. Spencer. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1977. Pp. viii, 203. \$12.50.

In this well-written volume, Donald S. Spencer recounts the visit of Hungarian patriot, Louis Kossuth, to the United States in 1851-52 to secure men and munitions to renew his desperate fight against the Habsburg Empire and its Russian allies. The eloquent Magyar arrived in America at a time when many citizens were convinced that God had entrusted to their republic the mission of waving the banner of freedom over the entire civilized world. The European revolutions of 1848 had stimulated "Young America's" self-image of altruism, nationalism, and progress. Proponents of spread-eagled Americanism exalted Kossuth wherever he traveled, for his presence invited comparison between American and European conditions, and stimulated within the United States the feeling of assured superiority over, as well as sympathy for, less favored peoples.

Kossuth's was a difficult task. He had captured the hearts of most Americans, but winning their minds was another matter. In order to convince Washington to abandon its long-standing principle of non-intervention in order to defend the principle of non-intervention in Europe (a nice paradox), he sought to penetrate the "doctrinal myth" of George Washington's Farewell Address. Kossuth lectured his hosts as he would a world power. The time had come for the nation to flex its muscles on behalf of freedom. Advances in communications and steam technology had rendered isolation obsolete. America should not abandon the Monroe Doctrine but extend it to the portals of St. Petersburg. Kossuth suggested four specific steps that would allow the nation to direct its new energy into a vigorous foreign policy committed to liberalism, democracy, and the global struggle against Russian tyranny: Washington should recognize Hungarian independence; President Millard Fillmore should warn the Tsar that another act of aggression