

# Land of the Seven Castles



Draft Oxen of Rural Transylvania.

(Prepared by the National Geographic Society, Washington, D. C.)

**R**UMANIA always was a land of contrast, geographically, socially, and historically, but since the great secretions to her territory that have come about as a result of the World War the contradictory elements within her borders are even more striking.

She contains an epitome of the history of Europe from Roman times to the present, and people and places illustrative of each stage are found side by side within her confines.

One may see on the same day a shepherd in a long fleece cape, moving across the plains toward the mountains like a quaint survival of an ancient civilization; a sery nomadic gypsy galloping along a dusty road, with long hair streaming; a peasant like a soldier from Trajan's column at Rome, with white, embroidered blouse and thigh-bound legs, scratching the soil with a primitive plow; a nobleman in his castle gazing down into a medieval Saxon village; and an oil magnate scattering his wealth amid Bucharest's imitative charms.

Many of these contrasts were inherent within the prewar boundaries and all of them in much enlarged postwar Rumania, due to the addition of Transylvania to the kingdom. This is because Transylvania, known in Rumanian as Ardeal (Forest Land), in Hungarian as Erdely, and in German as Siebenburgen, has been the frontier of the West against the East for centuries.

Its inhabitants have, furthermore, successfully maintained that border against the Turks since 1700, and this history of border wardenship has given the region its racial complexity and architectural charms.

#### Mixture of Races.

The towns of the castles were settled by Germans from Franco-Galicia, who were locally called Saxons and who, in all the years of their separation from Germany, have maintained a close connection with their mother country, its culture and institutions, the while efficiently keeping the Carpathian frontier.

They had likewise the co-operation of the Szeklers, close kinsmen of Magyars, who for their delight in combat have been settled along the northern portion of the mountain wall. Back of these warders the mass of Magyar farmers and Rumania laborers, foresters, and shepherds tilled the fertile valleys between the rolling foothills that gradually ebb from the Carpathians toward the Hungarian plain.

It is this mountain wall that accounts for the history of Transylvania—a jagged, glorious barrier that dominates the landscape.

The Saxon woman, pausing in the field to adjust her straw sailor hat atop her tightly bound kerchief, gazes at the rugged heights as if at the border of the unknown. The Rumanian, cowering, driving his black cattle along the hill, knows that beyond those heights the brothers of his race now rule; and the Magyar farmer looks upon them and wishes they had been higher and untraversable.

Yes, had the mountains been impassable, Transylvania would have been neither so picturesque nor so rich. The Turks accuse for the past century, burned churches, and great towers, crisscross with the East, and the property of the valley is now and then toward the mountains.

graphic situation, like a natural fortress on the borders of Europe, has been semi-independent from early times, and was recognized among the titles of the king of Hungary as a grand principality. However, administratively, it had been since 1938 an integral part of Hungary.

In this status the country remained until 1918, though not without certain uprisings among the Rumanian population which was denied many of the political rights enjoyed by the other three nationalities. As a result of the peace treaties, following the World War, and on the basis of the fact that a larger portion of the inhabitants of this region were Rumanian in race and language, the province became a part of Rumania.

The best way to obtain the full flavor of Transylvania is to approach it from the east via the road from Bucharest to Sinaia, across the baking, dusty plain, through the region heavy with the odor of petroleum, up the slopes of the Carpathians where mountain streams have gashed rough earth wounds in the hillside, past artificial-looking folklore castles, to the ancient frontier of Transylvania, at the top of the pass at Predeal.

Before one comes in sight of Brasov one is already aware of what the mountain barrier has meant and what it has protected for so many centuries. In about half an hour from Predeal the mountains give way to the fertile plain known as the Burzenland, which surrounds Brasov.

#### Brasov is interesting.

This town of some 60,000 inhabitants has been suggested as a capital for the new and greater Rumania, and it has much to recommend it, being almost in the center of the country, easily defended, having the charm of age and tradition and room for expansion in the surrounding plain.

The present-day citizens of Brasov look not unlike German university students; no trace of centuries of battles with the heathen gleams in their spectacled eyes, and no frontiersman's freedom of motion betrays itself through their stiff-cut clothes.

The Black church, which dominates the town, derives its name from the fact that it was burned in 1689 and never properly scoured since. The result is both dour and impressive. It is a good example of Fifteenth-century Gothic, without any tower.

With Brasov as a center, one may explore the Saxon and Szekler regions at the base of the mountains. Southward lies the Saxon town of Rasnov (Rosenau), over which towers the massive ruin of the Burgberg, now owned by the former Crown Prince Carol of Rumania.

There is no approach by road to this giant fortress, but a sharp climb brings one to what was a little city inclosed within the great walls of the castle, whose massive keep still dominates the plain. This once populous village is now inhabited by a single farmer and his wife, who occupy the fortress where once a hundred Teutonic knights kept the border of heathenness.

Beyond Rasnov the road continues into a narrowing valley toward the pass at Brau. Just where the mountain walls almost meet, a little knoll with the river and road curving sharply at its base is topped by the castle of Brau, a gift to the cause of Rumania by the city corporation of Brau. This fortress the most beautiful and best preserved in the region.

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### Value of Reiteration

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### Spicy Story

George Plympton, the scenario writer, loves to tell how he broke into the literary game. He was in New York at the time, and personally submitted his first offense to the editor. The editor took one look at the main title and said:

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### His Cure

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"They used to have that effect on me," returned the prosy man.

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### After Many Years

"You remember that watch I lost five years ago?" said Twitwhit.

"Yes," said his friend. "You remember how I looked high and low for it? Well, yesterday I put on a vest I had not worn for years, and what do you think I found in the pocket?"

"Your watch—splendid!" "No. I found the hole it must have dropped through."

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### Wants to Escape

Little Tommy—Father, you bought sister a piano; you must buy me a bicycle.

Pop—What for? Little Tommy—So I can go out riding when she is practicing.—Philadelphia Inquirer.

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### Not Too Many

Rich Old Aunt (recovering from accident)—I'm afraid I shall feel the effects of this accident for many years to come. Nephew (with expectations)—I sincerely hope not, auntie.—Boston Transcript.

### Of Course

"He believes in turning the other cheek." "Preacher?" "No, barber."

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### Of Course

Pilkington—There is O'Gay and his wife and his wife's sister getting out of his car. Wilkington—Which one is his wife? Pilkington—The one he didn't help out of the car.—New Bedford Standard.

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