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A silent heroine  
The life of J. Miss H.

A young scottish journalist rang me up one evening on May 1994, and told me that he wants to write an article in the quality newspaper "Scotland on Sunday /Spectrum/" about J. H.'s life, who had been the matron of the Scottish Mission Boarding School in Budapest /Vörösmarty utca 49-51/ from 1932 till 1944. He hearded that I had been living in the Boarding School from 1934 till 1942. He asked: "If it is possible to speak with me that evening?" I gathered everything I could find about the life of my wonderful matron, who gave a very important influence in my life, and I was really shocked to think about the tragical story of that remarkable woman.

She was born in 1897 near Dumfriess and was descended from a farming family. At the Academy of Dumfriess she learned Latin, French and German. Later she moved to Glasgow. She was a religious teacher in her local church, Queen's Park West, and taught in the Sunday School. Her dream was a missionary work among Eastern European Jews. When she spotted an advert in the Church of Scotland Magazine Life and Work for a matron in a Budapest Mission School she applied at once.

When she set off for Hungary she had just turned 35. In late June of 1932 J. H. arrived at 51 Vörösmarty utca, the Pest side of the Danube. The school had more than 300 girls, many of whom were Jewish. About 50 were boarders. Many Jewish parents sent their daughters to the school because they were poor to cope with their upbringing. For the children H. had complete responsibility.

She was a mother for all of us, and she treated us equally. She was rigorous, but lovely. She had a fantastic heart, you always felt you were the one she loved most. She had already secured a reputation for remarkable discretion and tact. She treated the secrets of the children very carefully. She gave herself fully to us. Carefree summer holiday were spent in a rented villa on Lake Balaton, where we swam and played.

In 1939 she returned to Scotland for the summer. When the German invaded Poland she immediately returned to Hungary. The country wasn't neutral more, Horthy maintained a relationship with Hitler's regime.

Urgent messages were now arriving from the Church of Scotland in Edinburgh ordering H. home. She refused: "If these children need me in the days of sunshine, how much more do they need me in the days of darkness?"

H [redacted] saw the future would be bleak. In 1944 German troops began occupying the country. When the time came to sew yellow stars on the clothes of her Jewish children she wept at the injustice of it all. Her ideal to convert the Jews was being replaced by a simpler Christian desire to protect them from hatred and discrimination.

Once, one man who was the member of the Hungarian Nazi Party /Arrowcross/ and was married with the cook's daughter ordered a meal from the kitchen. Miss Haining said that the food destined for her girls and angrily confronted the man. He left and wanted revenge on J [redacted] H [redacted]. Perhaps this blunder led to her death.

Adolf Eichmann delivered 750,000 Jews including many girls from the Mission. Two SS officers on April 1944 marched to H [redacted]'s quarter. She was given 15 minutes to pack a suitcase. She was taken to the basement of Gestap headquarters, then to the prison of Pó utca. Eight charges were ranged against her, then she realised her betrayer was the cook's son in law.

She was crammed into a cattle truck along with more than 100 others. The destination was Oswiecim /Auschwitz/. Her number was on her forearm 79467. She could see the overworked crematoria chimney.

She could write two letters from there. In the last letter on Juli 15 1944 she wrote: 'Even here on the road to heaven there are mountains, further away than ours to be sure, but still' She died two days later. She was ill and she starved to death, but perhaps she was sent to the gas chambers. She was 47.

The Scottish Mission survived the war as a church only.

At her old church in Glasgow two stained glass windows are dedicated to her memory. In Jerusalem she is honoured at the Jad Vashem Holocaust Memorial. The school in Vörösmarty utca 49 the former Scottish school, today state school, preserved her name with a plaque and a J [redacted] H [redacted] award is given annually to the pupils who visit Scotland and her birthplace.

She believed that all human beings are equal and therefore she died.