

WHAT AN ENGLISHMAN OBSERVED IN THE HUNGARY OF THE "AGE OF REFORM"

by

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Of the many Englishmen who have been to Hungary the one who on the present occasion is the subject of my paper was in our country just a hundred years ago, the object of his visit being to familiarise himself with the life of the Hungarian people. This Englishman studied our public life thoroughly — for about eighteen months —, investigating the past and the present, and finally settled in Transylvania as the husband of a daughter of one of our great Hungarian families.

This Englishman was *John Paget*, of whom — after the appearance of his monumental work (two volumes) Francis Toldi wrote as follows: — „the eminent author is undoubtedly the first foreigner who — apart from being more or less well informed respecting conditions in Hungary — has arrived at an independent attitude respecting our country”. And the critic of those days was right. Paget was certainly the best informed respecting Hungary of all the foreigners who had been to our country. He travelled all over Hungary, visiting all the better known towns and regions alike in the Lowlands so rich in romance, in the mountainous province of Transylvania and in Trans-Danubia. His interest in Hungary was first aroused in Italy when he met Baroness Polyxena Wesselényi, to whom he was married shortly after his travels in Hungary. He came to our country first in 1835; after his marriage he settled definitively in Transylvania, on the estate belonging to his wife. He was an enthusiastic farmer, taking an active part in addition in public life too. He was warmly attached to his adopted country and raturously espoused the cause of the Hungarian nation. In 1848 he served the Hungarian cause both as a soldier and as a writer, keeping the English press constantly informed of events in Hungary; but after the surrender at Világos he too was driven to leave the country. He went to England, not returning until 1855, when he found his estate in a very sorry plight. Even his library had been scattered to the winds by the Rumanians. All his life he took an exceptional interest in the fate of the Unitarians of Transylvania, acting as a connecting

link between them and their co-religionists in England. The endowment received from England was due to his intervention and he always took a personal interest in the welfare of the Unitarian Church of Hungary. It is worth recording that his son, Oliver Paget, served with other Hungarian volunteers in Garibaldi's army.

These are the most important data of the life of the English traveller who became so good a Hungarian; all we need add is that John Paget lived to a very great age, dying in 1892 at the age of 84.

His work dealing with Hungary and Transylvania is still enjoyable and instructive reading; for it gives us a surprisingly exact and precise transverse section of our political and social life.

Before he crossed the Hungarian frontier, while in Vienna he too was told many tales of "the wild Hungarians", of the "dangers of the journey" etc. One of the first remarks made by Paget is to the effect that travelling is just as safe in Hungary as in England. Despite the biased and tendentious stories he had heard of conditions in that country Paget enthusiastically espoused the cause of Hungary, almost his first feeling on arriving there being one of gratitude at being again in a country where liberty was still alive. It is not true — said Paget — that the Hungarians are rebels, as we are told in Vienna, simply because they speak loudly about matters concerning which their more cautious neighbours do not even dare to talk in whispers. He was entranced by the warmth and openness of Hungarian life; though he was equally moved when he had the opportunity to listen to and to see the great men of the country. He heard Francis Deák — then still a young man — at the Pozsony Diet. Not a sound was to be heard — so Paget tells us — when Deák began to speak in his deep and passionate voice in the matter of the Wesselényi Trial. Our traveller then tells us that Deák was followed by Kossuth, a young orator of great promise. But Paget met also Count Stephen Széchenyi, the "greatest Magyar": that was later on, when he went to Pest. It was at the landing-stage of the Danube steamer: every-

one suddenly turned to watch a man who was small of stature but possessed brilliant eyes and dressed so like an Englishman that if it had not been for his moustache he might have been taken for an Englishman. He was the cynosure of all eyes; everyone endeavoured to show tokens of profound respect. Despite the composure of his features it was evident that the stranger knew he was the centre of observation and was at the same time equally conscious that the chief role in the drama of Hungarian life had been allotted to him. It was Stephen Széchenyi, of whose reforms and creations Paget writes a separate chapter full of exhaustive details.

But the things he saw at the Diet were not the only things that impressed the English traveller. The county institution had contributed wonderfully to preserve the ancient liberties; so that — Paget continues — notwithstanding all difficulties and despite the censorship and their political isolation and numerous other obstacles the Hungarians had sounder political views than many of those European nations which possess what is called a higher civilisation. The reason why he deals in detail with the county administration is that in his opinion it must prove of interest to England, which had much to learn also from the example given by Hungary. In conclusion he declares that the Hungarians have no need of a revolution; for the spirit and the form of their ancient Constitution affords every liberty desirable. If any amendment were required, that amendment should be effected in fields where the weaker and the oppressed have to be afforded protection.

The keen-eyed observer — who might have boasted that he knew Hungary better than any of his compatriots — here and there (on the basis of his own personal experience) refutes the mistakes made by those contemporary English travellers who had given more or less credence to the absurd stories told them in Vienna and had consequently just rushed through the country, observing what they saw only superficially, and had then presumed to make daring statements about Hungary. Quin, for instance, who had spent only ten days in Hungary, had nevertheless presumed to publish his "opinions" of that country; Captain Hall, who had merely crossed the Hungarian frontier, had been impelled by the memory of a bad lunch — which had evidently excessively annoyed him — to call in question the kindness and courtesy of one of the most hospitable nations in the world, — and that after two or three hours in the country!

Paget showed a familiarity with the subject quite unusual in a foreigner when he set to work to refute these daring generalisations. That he proved able to write of our country with such understanding and such cordial sympathy, was undoubtedly due in part to the hearty reception he was accorded everywhere he went. He could not find words to adequately stress the interest and sympathy for England he found everywhere among Hungarians. His experience made him emphasise the fact that in Hungary everything was in keeping with English tastes. Times without number he met

Hungarians able to speak English fairly fluently. The angolmania of the country had originated with the aristocrats; but it had soon found followers in other ranks of society too. English customs were being introduced into Hungary; and English sport was making headway everywhere: Paget himself subsequently helped to spread English ideas in Transylvania. He was astonished to see how well Hungarians knew the political, social and intellectual life of England. He found that the Hungarians were quite familiar with the eminent British statesmen and very carefully watched developments in the London Parliament. They imitated English customs and were enthusiastic admirers of English literature. At Lőcse — a town situated in Upper Hungary, which was wrested from Hungary and annexed to Czecho-Slovakia by the Treaty of Trianon — a little girl handed Paget a bouquet of flowers "on behalf of the women of Hungary". He was respected and honoured as the compatriot of Shakespeare, Byron and Scott. But it was not only as the compatriot of great and immortal writers that Paget was honoured as he passed through Hungary; the homage and courtesy he received was accorded him simply because he was an Englishman. In those days, when Hungarians gazed with longing eyes on the classical home of constitutional liberty, Hungary was infinitely grateful for every word of appreciation and understanding that found its way from beyond the Channel. The British interest in Hungary was received then with just as much gratitude and enthusiasm as it is today — in post-Trianon days.

Paget's appreciation of that gratitude are well worth hearing. He happened to pass through Szolnok, where the deputy sheriff, on hearing that the strangers passing through the town were Englishmen whose travels in Hungary had been rich in delightful and interesting experiences, was so pleased with the appreciation that he could not find words to express his gratitude and his gratification. He had their carriage filled with choice fruit and with Szolnok loaves, which he declared were the best bread in the world. Speaking of this incident, Paget says: —

"The mention of Szolnok reminds me of one of the many instances of politeness we received from persons to whom we were totally unknown. As we stopped at the town-house, and sent in our assignation for fresh horses, the Szolga-biro came out, and raising his little cap, assured us horses should be procured as soon as possible. He was a good-tempered-looking man, and was evidently so anxious for a chat with the strangers that we did not like to disappoint him. He knew from our assignation that we were Englishmen; and no sooner did he learn from our conversation that we had taken the trouble examine the richness and beauties of his native land, and found much to admire and respect, both in the country and its institutions, than he scarce knew how to express his joy. Never was there a people more grateful for sympathy than the Hungarians. He would not allow us to leave the town till he had filled the carriage with the choicest peaches, melons, and plums, from his own garden; not to mention a large

loaf of Szolnok bread, which he pronounced, and I believe he was right too, to be the very best in Hungary. It is true, all this might be nothing but the effect of good-nature: and yet, reader, had you seen the real kindness with which it was done, the interest the good man took in our journey, the sentiments he expressed in favour of our native

land; had you received all this attention from an individual you never saw before, and whom in all human probability you would never see to yourself you owed it, — you must be differently constructed from me if you did not find yourself a happier man than when you entered Szolnok." (Vol. I. p. 533—34.)

(To be continued.)

CZECHO-SLOVAKIA — THE BULWARK OF THE MOSUL PETROLEUM FIELDS?

by

Colonel Dr. Eugene Tombor

The Czech Colonel Emmanuel Moravec, a member of the teaching staff of the Prague Military College, has written a monograph entitled "*The Strategic Importance of Czecho-Slovakia for Western Europe*" which has been published in English and French by the Prague "Orbis" Press. The real object of this work is to convince the Great Powers of Europe how vitally important it is to them that Czecho-Slovakia should not be crushed by the Third German Empire.

We shall deal with this propaganda pamphlet quite objectively: but we cannot pass over in silence the suggestions — absolutely wrong from a military point of view — which are liable to mislead the uninitiated reader.

The fundamental idea behind Mr. Moravec's monograph is the following: —

The Germans are endeavouring to expand their sphere of influence along the "*Eurasian transversal*" from *Hamburg through Prague, Budapest, Constantinople and Mosul to Bushire* on the *Persian Gulf*. The German advance is flanked by Poland and Italy, which must also be overcome by the Germans, if only because in the opinion of Chancellor Hitler the Adriatic and even the Ukraine are objectives of German aspirations. The above-mentioned "*transversal*" must be set over against the strategic front consisting of the line from *Genoa via Prague to Warsaw* which cuts that transversal horizontally. Czecho-Slovakia is the country most immediately exposed to attack from Germany; that country being an advance outpost of the Little Entente and the Balkan Alliance under the protection of which her allies can comfortably make their preparations. The German penetration is a danger, not only to the countries mentioned above, but also to Russia (whose interests are threatened in the Ukraine and in the Caucasus) and Great Britain (whose occupation of Mosul would be endangered). France is not immediately concerned; the only point touching her interests being the penetration into Syria of the "*Eurasian line*": though of course the mere strengthening of Germany's position would involve a menace to France's interests. Moreover, neither

Great Britain nor France could possibly tolerate the appearance of the Germans in the Mediterranean. Consequently, France too must join the *Genoa—Prague—Warsaw* line, unless she wishes to share the fate of Spain and be relegated politically to the peripheries of Europe. Should Prague be struck out of the *Paris—Genoa—Prague—Warsaw* line, — so Mr. Moravec tells us, — the only possible strategic front would be *Paris—Genoa—Sulina—Warsaw*. In the author's opinion not one of the Great Powers enumerated above could afford to dispense with the existence of Czecho-Slovakia. Bismarck himself declared long ago that "the Power having dominion over Bohemia must dominate the whole of Europe". It is therefore quite comprehensible that the Germans should speak of Czecho-Slovakia as "a thorn thrust deep into Germany's flesh".

INNER MILITARY WEAKNESS OF CZECHO-SLOVAKIA

The above summary of the leading ideas of the pamphlet is extremely condensed and concise: the main point is reached by the author after a long and exhaustive historical and geographical introduction written with the object of throwing into relief the European importance of Bohemia in the light of centuries of history. Later on Mr. Moravec endeavours with the help of lengthy arguments in the course of which he keeps on repeating himself to persuade the reader to endorse his views. I shall deal below — where such a proceeding is necessary — with those views of the author not comprised in the above summary.

However, by way of introduction we too — following the cue given us by Mr. Moravec — would deal with the ethnographical and geographical significance of Czecho-Slovakia; that being a matter of importance strategically the study of which must considerably lessen the military value of that State.

According to the author Czecho-Slovakia contains more than 15 million inhabitants — that number including 11 million Czecho-Slovaks and Ruthenians. This statement is enough in itself to give rise to erroneous conclusions. The Czech