

# AN ENGLISH TRAVELLER SPEAKS OF COUNT STEPHEN SZÉCHENYI'S IMMORTAL WORK

(MARGINAL NOTES ON THE PROFANATION OF THE SZÉCHENYI  
TABLET ON THE LOWER DANUBE)

by

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The December, 1936, issue of the "Danubian Review" published original photographs showing the damage done to the Lower Danube Memorial by the Rumanians. The Rumanians were indignant that the tablet on the rocky walls should proclaim the epoch-making achievement of Count Stephen Széchenyi, the "greatest Hungarian", in making the Lower Danube navigable. It went against their grain that the Memorial Tablet should constantly remind the passengers of Danube steamers of Széchenyi's great work: so they had Széchenyi's name obliterated.

Lest we should be accused of one-sidedness, we would refer to the opinion of Széchenyi's achievement voiced by an eyewitness whose very nationality is sufficient to guarantee his complete objectivity in the matter. We refer to *Michael Joseph Quin* (1796—1843),<sup>1</sup> the English traveller and journalist who made repeated journeys through many countries of Europe and then recorded his impressions either in English periodicals or in independent works. His objectivity is certified also by the semi-official character of his visit, the object in view being to supply the British Government with information on certain questions.<sup>2</sup> His adventurous journey through Hungary is described in the book called "*A Steam Voyage down the Danube*".<sup>3</sup> On September 24th., 1834, he arrived in Budapest, continuing his journey from that city — after a short rest — by steamer to the Black Sea. The greatest surprise he experienced was that caused by the regulation works on the Lower Danube then proceeding with feverish haste. To quote his own words, "The echoes of these detonations resounding among the mountains and along the waters, gave peculiar interest to the scene;

they spoke of enterprise and industry well applied, and were the harbingers of national prosperity, civilisation and happiness."<sup>4</sup>

The motor force of the whole work was the great Hungarian Reformer, Count Stephen Széchenyi, who "was now actively engaged in superintending the works going on upon the Danube, which were entirely the result of his public spirit and his indefatigable perseverance".<sup>5</sup> Széchenyi knew well what the introduction of steam navigation on the Danube meant both commercially and politically; that is why he considered it imperatively urgent that the Danube should be regulated, that being the only means of enabling Hungary to open up connections also with the far-distant countries of the East. "The enterprise was originated by the Count, who, at an early period of his life, plainly perceived the great advantages that would accrue to Hungary, if it were rendered navigable for steam-boats to the Black Sea".<sup>6</sup> When he obtained the understanding support of the leaders of Hungarian public life for his scheme, conditions among our Rumanian neighbours were such that even the most well-disposed observer would have failed to discover any trace of similar cultural endeavours in their country. It was the generous donations of the Hungarian gentry that made it possible to begin the exceptionally costly operations and to purchase the boats to be used. The petition presented to Parliament requesting permission to embark on the enterprise was submitted by Széchenyi in the teeth of the opposition of Metternich, his answer to the suspicions of the Austrian statesman was simply, "if you have no wish that the Diet should adopt the petition and act upon it, *do the thing yourselves*, for the Danube at all events cannot be long without steam-boats".<sup>7</sup> It was only by will-power of such force that the

<sup>1</sup> See Dictionary of National Biography, Vol. XLVII.

<sup>2</sup> See *Fest, Sándor*: — „Angolok Magyarországon a Reformkorszakban, 1825—48 . . .”, p. 43.

<sup>3</sup> *Quin, Michael J.*: — „A Steam Voyage down the Danube” (London, 2 vols.).

<sup>4</sup> *Quin, op. cit.*, p. .

<sup>5</sup> *Quin, op. cit.*, p. 109.

<sup>6</sup> *Quin, op. cit.*, p. 124.

<sup>7</sup> *Quin, op. cit.*, p. 125.

reform of such general interest to Hungary could be carried into effect.

This undeniable fact has been established by an English journalist of absolutely impartial feelings who was entirely disinterested in the matter. To those who are familiar with the objective love of truth of the English people his opinion cannot be a matter of indifference. There can be no doubt that the name of Széchenyi had a perfect right to figure on that Tablet on the Lower Danube; surely a very modest tribute — a mere trifling act of courtesy — on the part of posterity in view of the enormous development following on the opening up of that trade route. The spirit of hatred has removed that Memorial Tablet from the view of

passengers travelling by that route. But we doubt whether that spirit will prove able to erase from the minds of the Hungarians driven against their will into subjection to a foreign yoke the names of the great Hungarian to whom that Tablet was dedicated and of his Hungarian companions and fellow-workers. We doubt whether that spirit will prove able to make educated Europeans ready to forget to inquire after the unalterable and indelible memorial tablets of historical facts and truths to be found without fail in the minds of all persons of sober judgment who sincerely desire a just peace.

*That was forgotten by those responsible for the destruction of the Tablet.*

## P O L I T I C A L M O S A I C

### “IN HUNGARY THE POLITICAL POWER RESTS FIRMLY IN THE HANDS OF THE CONSTITUTIONAL FACTORS”

Premier Darányi's Statement in re the Fantastic Rumours Spread in Foreign Countries.

Early in March fantastic rumours were being spread abroad respecting some alleged "putsch" in Hungary. The truth about the situation is that, while Czecho-Slovakia, Rumania and Yugoslavia have for eighteen years been the scene of embittered nationality struggles, — while in Czecho-Slovakia the most draconic laws are being enforced against the real and imagined enemies of the Republic, — while in Rumania the antagonisms between Right and Left keep breaking out in murders and bloody deeds, — and while Yugoslavia is only just beginning to gradually and painfully liquidate the institutions of a Dictatorship that weighed heavily on that country for years, — in Hungary since the autumn of 1919 there has been the most perfect order and tranquillity. If under such circumstances insignificant inner political movements in Hungary give rise at once to fantastic rumours, that only shows that our ill-wishers grudge our continuing to be an oasis of order and peace in the maelstrom of the Danube Valley.

In his speech made in the Hungarian Parliament on March 10th. the Hungarian Premier, Dr. Kálmán Darányi, finally dismissed these fantastic rumours by declaring *inter alia* that "*the political power in the country rests firmly in the hands of the constitutional factors — of the Legislature and the Government — in witness whereof I may refer, for instance, to the tranquil atmosphere in which our Parliament is continuing its work. Despite the unfavourable conditions prevailing our economic life shows a gradual and constant development, while we are taking every care to secure the consolidation of our public finances.* I feel sure that all objective observers must admit that the Government is carrying out the objects it has set before itself — objects now familiar to the whole country — in the order and at the rate which it originally proposed.

"Naturally enough *we cannot possibly allow our work of gradual construction undertaken to secure the economic and social order and development of the country to be interrupted by the endeavours of any extremist movement whatsoever; and we are not prepared in the future either to tolerate that work being endangered by any extremist movement.* With the data at our disposal I may however safely say that *no danger threatens that work at present. Government has no reason whatsoever even to presume that any outside factor desires — even indirectly — to endeavour to obtain any influence on the direction of political life in Hungary; and I must most decidedly protest against the spreading of irresponsible rumours which without the slightest foundation in fact would fain disseminate statements on the kind.* Government sincerely regrets that irresponsible rumours of the kind should have found credence in public opinion. It considers such credulity on the part of public opinions particularly regrettable in view of the fact that *the rumours in question actually presumed to involve the person of the accredited representative in Hungary of a Power friendly to our country and endeavoured to attribute to him an attitude which had no foundation either in the facts of the case or in the absolutely correct conduct of the personality in question.*

„If the nation is entitled to expect Government to maintain the order of the country all at costs, — and both I and the Members of the Government do readily undertake that duty —, the Government and the Legislature may in return, I believe, expect public opinion not to encourage such hysterical tittle-tattle, which runs from mouth to mouth irresponsibly and is calculated to create an atmosphere not in the least justified by the actual situation which however react detrimentally on the economic and political interests of the country.