

ANGLO-HUNGARIAN CONNECTIONS IN HISTORY

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(Conclusion.)

In the Habsburg Empire established on the basis of the decisions of 1715 Hungary was the only parliamentary State — indeed, outside Britain she was the only parliamentary State in the whole of Europe.

It is not generally known that Baron Montesquieu also visited the Hungarian Parliament and that the first impressions for the writing of his work entitled "*L'esprit des lois*" were those obtained in Hungary on that occasion. His work could not be published in France, because an absolute government was then in power; but when he looked through the library of the royal palace in Potsdam which he had occupied, Napoleon found Montesquieu's book among those read by Frederick the Great. In England and Hungary, on the other hand, the work did not cause any stir; for all it contained was a simple description of the existing political system. Probably the most interesting moment is that, while on the one hand the Austrian Government took every precaution to prevent the dissemination of the work in Vienna, the book was nevertheless to be found in show-windows in Pozsony, a town quite near to Vienna in which the Hungarian Parliament held its sessions.

We know that it was Montesquieu's work that made public opinion anxious to familiarise itself with the English Constitution. It was on the basis of that work that De Lolme, a Genevan by birth, compiled the relevant material, — Count Stephen Széchenyi having tried to translate his book

into Hungarian. It was in 1815, after the Vienna Congress had finished its discussions, that "the greatest Hungarian" (a name given to Széchenyi by Louis Kossuth) first visited England: when he returned, he had already made up his mind to initiate a programme of reforms in Hungary on the basis of the experiences he had gained in England.

It was this visit to England that ushered in the so-called "Age of Reform", which lasted until 1848 and transformed Hungary in keeping with the demands of the age. Gradually — despite the obstacles impeding communication and the great distances — Hungary found herself advancing once more — as in the Middle Ages — in the company of the States of the highly-cultured West of Europe. Hungary thereby became once more the advanced outpost of the Western community of nations, on the one hand forming an impregnable barrier of resistance to the attacks of Eastern barbarians and on the other opening out an approach admitting influences from the West.

The reason why Széchenyi chose to follow the lead of the British statesmen attending the Vienna Congress was that he hoped that the burning flame of their culture and love of liberty would provide his nation with the spark required to fire the spirit of that nation and bring it to its own again. He was inspired by the same fiery love of liberty which he found in England, — a desire and a love which had at all times guided the actions of the Hungarian people. His refraining from entering the arena of political agitation showed the quality but not the intensity of Széchenyi's reform movement; for his creations betrayed a fever of creative genius and a longing for spiritual and material emancipation such as we find only in most successful agitators. There is a difference, however: for, whereas political agitators usually come into conflict with the existing government, and have more than once been compelled to withdraw as a consequence of the conflict all Széchenyi's creations alike have remained in existence. We still have the Danube, the river on which Széchenyi's boats were steered by English steersmen; we still have the bridge which Széchenyi engaged an English engineer to build; we still have the Iron Gate defile which was thrown open to international navigation by Széchenyi;

we still have the Academy of Sciences which he first proposed to establish for the cultivation of the Hungarian language and of Hungarian literature; we still have the clubs called "Casinos" which were established after English models and became the meeting-places of the Hungarian educated classes; we still have the system of drainage of wild waters which provided the people with land and a subsistence; we still have the steam engines and machines the models of which he brought with him from England for the purpose of laying the foundations of Hungarian industry; and we still have the horse-races, the aftermath of those established by Széchenyi in which race-horses trained by Englishmen ran: and we must not forget that thereby he made Hungary the second home of open-air sports and equipped her to take her place as the worthy rival of England, the original home of those sports.

There is no denying either that Louis Kossuth, the Liberal, followed English models; but he did not develop the visible, utilisable and palpable creations of Széchenyi: what he desired to do was to achieve or rather recover the political liberty of a Hungarian nation enriched by those creations. It was nevertheless inevitable that the mind of Széchenyi, who feared the destruction of his creations, should become unhinged. He was not destined to live to see his social and economic reforms convert Hungary into a highly-developed, strong and even powerful pivot of the whole Habsburg Empire. In the natural order of things a younger generation was needed which found the accomplished work and the reforms sufficiently effective to make use of their fruits and to enable the nation now arrived at a certain stage of development to demand from a foreign government then in power political rights, liberty and independence.

There were others besides Széchenyi who took particular exception to Louis Kossuth's having divided Hungary into two hostile camps — those of the Magyars and of the non-Magyar nationalities respectively. Such an attitude cannot however be accepted as fully in keeping with the truth.

But Széchenyi, who had made it one of his objects to develop the language, literature and intellectual life of the Hungarians, did not forget the non-Magyar nationalities either. Not only did he set them an example; they on their part followed that example, no obstacle being thrown in their way. This cultural organisation of the peoples of Hungary embraced Magyars and non-Magyars alike; and no one has ever asserted that Kossuth in any form or in any connection did anything to thwart this work of organisation. The questions in respect of which Kossuth is usually shown in opposition to the non-Magyar nationalities, were political, not cultural. It is true that there was a difference in this respect between the two statesmen, both of whom were inspired by English models: the difference appeared particularly in the circumstance that, while Széchenyi was concerned with cultural reforms, Kossuth concentrated on political reforms. Széchenyi believed that the time was not yet ripe for the broaching of political questions calculated to delay the economic strengthening of the country. Kossuth on the other hand believed the nation already strong enough to demand the rights due to it. What he demanded did not contain any claims not granted to Hungary by later ages; but, while Kossuth and Széchenyi were agreed in insisting on a maintenance of the historical Hungarian State, the statesmen of later ages also continued the policy, which aimed the maintenance and not the weakening of the Hungarian State. Indeed, even at the time of the Revolution of 1848 the non-Magyar nationalities of Hungary had no desire to be severed from Hungary it was only influence from outside, combined with promises impossible of fulfilment, that persuaded them eventually to take up arms against the Magyars. For no one could believe that the reason why the Vienna Government then at war with the Magyars had granted the Serbs of Hungary a territory enjoying special privileges, was to augment the Serbian Principality of the Balkans, which was still a province of Turkey. Hungary had been an independent Hungarian State even in the

days when the language of the public administration was Latin; nor could any serious objection be raised against the Hungarian State choosing Magyar as the official language of the country when it became possible to replace the Latin language previously in use. The Kingdom of Great Britain just as naturally chose English to replace Latin.

Until foreign influence intervened to stir up hostility between the Magyars and the non-Magyar nationalities, the movement of both sections of the Hungarian nation had run parallel. Such a state of things was considerably furthered by the fact that the territory of Hungary was large enough to have provided a subsistence for three times the number of inhabitants. Nor would there have been any complications even if the Magyars had not been compelled to make such sacrifice of life in defence of Western civilisation and had been able to propagate unhindered in the period following the Mongol invasion in the thirteenth century. As may be proved with the aid of a tax-roll of the latter end of the fifteenth century still in existence, the population of Hungary — then predominatingly Magyar — should under peaceful conditions by the beginning of the twentieth century have increased to thirty millions. Had there been no obstacle to such a development, there would undoubtedly have been far less room for all the refugees who fled to Hungary from the Balkans to escape Turkish persecution, and still less for the settlers imported into Hungary from Germany and provided with all good things by the Vienna Government. In that event the Hungarian inhabitants would have filled the whole of the Danube Basin and would undoubtedly have been in a position to give a still more pronouncedly Magyar character to that Hungarian State which the masses of foreigners immigrating into Hungary had prevented from becoming such. We must not forget, however, that the incalculable effect of their peaceful symbiosis was reflected in Magyars and non-Magyars alike insisting on a maintenance of this peaceful union. For it was always from without that the endeavours which aimed at causing trouble and even civil war by inciting against one another the Magyar and non-Magyar

citizens of the country, intervened to weaken the power of the Hungarian State and the Hungarian nation.

All these facts had to be related in order to explain the Revolution of 1848, which is often described as having been due to Kossuth's work as an agitator. It is indubitable, indeed, that Kossuth displayed uncommon energy in his endeavour to help his Party to secure the reins of government and the executive power; but it should not be forgotten that he regarded as his antagonists, not the country or even the non-Magyar inhabitants of the country, but solely and exclusively the Vienna Government. He forgot, however, — and that was the real cause of his tragedy — that when it turned the non-Magyar nationalities against the Magyars the Vienna Camarilla found a powerful ally in that Russia which hoped that a war between Austria and Hungary would lead to a realisation of her own plans.

This circumstance must be remembered; otherwise we shall fail to understand why the Hungarian Revolutionary Government appealed for aid against the Russian attack — of which numerous reports had been received by that Government — to Great Britain. To Lord Palmerston the situation did not appear to be a serious one; while Czar Nicholas sent an army of 200,000 to Hungary for the purpose of crushing that country and handing it over — when no longer able to defend itself — to the Austrian Government, which then incorporated it in Austria. For Lord Palmerston did not know — and indeed people in the West of Europe generally did not know — that the Hungarian State had never formed part of a foreign State, — a circumstance of which he was reminded by a Memorandum presented to him at the end of 1848 by Ladislas Szalay, who was sent to London for the purpose. And the reason why the action to avert Russian intervention failed, was that the British Foreign Secretary was convinced that the overthrow of the Hungarian national movement would strengthen Austria, that country being then better able to resist the power of Russia.

The delicate task of trying to avert interference on the part of Russia was undertaken by Count Julius Andrassy, the young agent of the Hungarian Government, who rode

to Constantinople in the spring of 1849 and with the co-operation of the British Ambassador, Sir Stratford Canning, strove to prevent Russia's expansion in Central Europe. Canning's view of the situation differed very considerably from that of Lord Palmerston; but all efforts made by him failed to check the Russians. That was not done until the Crimean War, — a circumstance which has impelled many inquirers to believe that the Crimean War would have been unnecessary if Czar Nicholas's plans had been thwarted already in 1849.

In this connection Hungarian policy cannot be blamed for being on the watch to prevent the attack to be expected from the East and for endeavouring to provide for her own defence. The work of providing for that self-defence was initiated long before 1848, not by Louis Kossuth, but by his political opponent Széchenyi, who was guided in his endeavour to enlist the interest of the British Government in the Danube Basin by a desire to obtain the support of Great Britain as guarantor of the independence of the Danubian peoples instead of relying upon the aid of a weak and helpless Austria — which was a Member of the Holy Alliance — to resist the advance of Russia. The opportunity was a very favourable one; for bread was dear in England, whereas wheat and flour were cheap in Hungary. Széchenyi was convinced that he was therefore entitled to expect the interest of Great Britain to be aroused, particularly as Britain would find in Hungary a suitable market for her own industrial products. Prince Paul Esterházy, Austro-Hungarian Ambassador in London, gladly co-operated with Széchenyi in the endeavour to enlist the sympathy of British public opinion, sending to Hungary in quick succession all the British merchants who were interested in the Danubian markets. After investigating the situation, these merchants demanded the establishment in Budapest of a British Consulate, a demand which, though people in Britain found it to be quite natural, was by no means to the taste of Prince Metternich, the all-powerful Chancellor of Austria, who feared that a friendship between Britain and Hungary would have consequences detrimental to the political interests of the Holy Alliance. That was the reason why he put an end

to the friendly co-operation of Széchenyi and Esterházy by recalling the latter and why he frustrated the scheme of establishing a British Consulate in Budapest. He forgot, however, that the place of Britain in Central Europe was being taken by Russia and that the Russian influence could not be ousted — as it would be later on — except at the cost of an Anglo-Russian war — i. e. of considerable loss of life.

Palmerston subsequently proposed to strengthen the Austria which had proved so weak by reconciling Hungary and satisfying her legitimate claims. He returned to the suggestions made by Stepney, the demand for the realisation of the same being repeated continuously until in 1867 Austria and Hungary finally concluded the agreement known as the "Ausgleich" or Compromise. Now, seeing that one of the authors of the Compromise, Count Julius Andrassy, attached great importance to Britain's friendship, we may without hesitation state that after 1867 in his capacity as Hungarian Premier, and after 1871 as Austro-Hungarian Foreign Minister, this statesman exerted his influence continuously in an endeavour to co-operate with Great Britain. This did not in any way run counter to the alliance concluded with Germany in 1879; for the latter merely opened the way for defence against a possible attack by Russia: and when in 1882 the alliance was expanded to a Triple Alliance including Italy, Great Britain was only too ready to promise co-operation.

On the other hand, neither the German alliance nor the Triple Alliance in any way prevented Kálmán Széll, the Prime Minister of Hungary, openly expressing sympathy with Great Britain in 1901, at a time when Britain had not a single friend on the Continent. Nor could it prevent Count Julius Andrassy jun., in his capacity as Hungarian Minister, from begging the German Emperor to make terms with Great Britain when the antagonism between Britain and Germany came to a head. The fact that Great Britain was already trying to obtain Russia as an ally, was only regarded with disfavour because in return for supporting her Western allies Russia claimed a free hand in the East and — according to a Memorandum handed to the London Foreign Office in 1915 by the Czech Dr. Masaryk — was endeavouring to

draw Hungary into her sphere of interests. When the power of Russia collapsed, a similar scheme of partition was carried into effect by the Western Powers owing to the fact that the latter were utterly ignorant of the Danubian situation.

All these events naturally did not affect the historical friendship between Great Britain and Hungary except in so far as — apart from showing the interest taken in Central European questions generally by Great Britain — they made it desirable that the brilliant past history of this friendship and its great efforts in the interests of peace should be followed by a similar future based upon a thorough familiarity with the conditions prevailing in the Danube Basin.

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