

COUNT ALBERT APPONYI AND AMERICA

BY

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On 9th February 1911 Mr. Joe Cannon, Speaker of the U. S. A. House of Representatives in Washington, led Count Albert Apponyi, amidst the applause of the members, to the Speaker's dais and asked him to address the House. Apponyi stood on the dais under the star-spangled banner and amidst profound silence began to speak. First he expressed his gratitude for the historical honour accorded in his person to the thousand-year-old constitutional Hungarian nation and then proceeded to declare that the greatness of America lay in the fact that the Americans had brought over with them England's noble traditions, but had left the harmful ones of the Old World behind them.

Apponyi's speech was delivered to the accompaniment of loud and prolonged applause. At its close the Representatives and Senators passed before him, each shaking him by the hand. On Representative Keifer's motion Count Apponyi's speech was recorded in the minute-book of the House.

The Hungarian statesman may well have felt — as he himself expressed it — "bewilderedly" moved, for up to the Great War only three foreigners had been honoured by Congress with the request for a speech: Lafayette, Kossuth and himself. One Frenchman and two Hungarians. It cannot have been pure accident that two sons of this small — and since then dismembered — country were accorded this "historical honour" by the mighty United States of America. Nor can the only explanation be that both Kossuth and Apponyi were gifted with an exceptional power of oratory in the English language. Even what Apponyi's great friend Theodore Roosevelt said of him, which was equally true of Kossuth too, does not wholly account for it, namely that "Weight was lent to Apponyi's powers of oratory not only by the loftiness of his ideas, the crystal-clear lucidity of his logic

and the artistry of his style, but more particularly by the moral fineness and greatness of his personality."

The features common to the histories of both countries and to the spiritual structures of both peoples, must have contributed largely to develop that unparalleled degree of sympathy which was the natural, practically instinctive, source of the great honour bestowed upon Kossuth and Apponyi. The most glorious era in the histories of both nations was a period of stubborn, heroic and self-sacrificing struggle for independence. The prevailing traits of both are a love of liberty, a sense of justice and pity for the oppressed. This was why the great United States of America took Kossuth and his compatriots, the exiles of the ill-starred Hungarian War of Independence, to her heart and why her sympathies went out to Apponyi, whom, as President of the Independent Party, America regarded as the protagonist of the Hungarian struggle for independence.

Apponyi visited America three times. His first visit was in 1904, on the occasion of a conference of the Inter-parliamentary Union in St. Louis. His fame, won by his successes in various international bodies, had preceded him. Apponyi delivered one of the opening addresses in St. Louis and spoke more than once at the conference. His official speech at the banquet in Philadelphia created an enormous impression. In the memorial album published after the conference Apponyi is described as "an orator of unparalleled power". On this occasion he also visited the places in the U. S. A. where Hungarians live in greater numbers and everywhere urged them to show an example of how the emigrant sons of a grateful and upright people might become the most zealous and loyal citizens of the country of their adoption.

One of the most important results of this visit was that Apponyi made the acquaintance of President Roosevelt. From this meeting a friendship sprung which only death was to sever. From that time on he was in constant correspondence with Roosevelt, who in 1910 came over to Hungary to see Apponyi. Here Roosevelt was welcomed with an enthusiasm — which also expressed Hungary's feelings for the United States — rarely shown to strangers. That

public opinion in America was so strongly imbued with feelings of sympathy for Apponyi, was to a great extent due to the great Hungarian statesman's behaviour at the Inter-parliamentary Conference held in Brussels in 1905. Namely it was here that the U. S. A. delegates submitted the suggestion that, as the best guarantee of the rule of right and peace, a permanent congress should be established which would be the legislative body for the framing of international law. Thus, as early as 1905, we see the first germs of Wilson's League of Nations plan, which in the post-war chaotic atmosphere of liberated passions was unfortunately carried out in such a manner that his own nation refused to co-operate.

The idea of a permanent congress of the nations was warmly supported in a magnificent speech by Apponyi as the official speaker of the day, and at his suggestion a committee was appointed to elaborate a plan. Apponyi took this opportunity of tendering his thanks to Roosevelt, who had just been successful in mediating peace between Russia and Japan. At the close of his speech Apponyi expressed his hope and belief that Europe would follow the example set by the United States and that the time would shortly come when Europe would have the right to say to America: "We are your equals."

Apponyi's second visit to America took place in 1911. With the assistance of the Carnegie Foundation, the New York Peace Society and the Civic Forum invited him for a four weeks' lecturing tour, in the course of which he was asked to speak in universities, societies and clubs on the future of pacifism, Hungary's political situation and the services rendered by Hungary to the development of civilization in Western Europe. The preparatory work was undertaken by Mr. Rogert Erskine Ely, President of the Civic Forum. Count Apponyi's lectures were such an unprecedented success that under their influence the House of Representatives in Washington invited him to address Congress.

Apponyi's third and most famous visit to America took place in 1923. This was only a few years after the conclusion of the Great War, and Apponyi's many friends had

every reason to fear that the atmosphere was not yet calm enough for the seventy-seven years old patriarch, a statesman of a country which had fought on the other side, to speak in America of the dangere lurking in the injustices of the Peace Treaties and reveal the future consequences of the terrible wrongs done to dismembered Hungary, which like canker were corroding the peace of Europe. But the Grand Old Man of Hungary had faith in the unbiassed commonsense of American public opinion and in the peculiarly American trait of being unable to refuse sympathy to the undeservedly oppressed.

The Committee which asked Apponyi to deliver a series of lectures before various distinguished societies, clubs and universities on the serious consequences of the mistaken Peace Treaties and the danger lurking in the unreasonable and unjust dismemberment of Hungary, consisted of the Chancellors of the Yale, McGill, Williamstown, Toronto, John Hopkins, Princeton and Harvard Universities, the heads of the Carnegie Institute of International Education, the Civic Forum, the Pan American Union and the Rockefeller Foundation, the Chairman of the New York State Chamber of Commerce and the Vice-President of the American Academy of Social and Political Sciences. Besides, the Committee included several Justices of the Supreme Court, editors, lawyers — amongst others Ch. G. Dawes, later Vice-President of the Republic — J. W. Davis, later candidate for the Presidency, General H. H. Bandholtz, and T. W. Lamont, Joint President of the Morgan firm.

Apponyi's lectures in New York, Cleveland, Chicago, Evanston, Boston, Baltimore, Newhaven and Canadian Toronto were a great success. On more than one occasion he entered into a debate with the Rumanian Bibesco and the Yugoslav Pupin, but from all these encounters Apponyi came out with flying colours, as was admitted at the banquet of the Chicago Association of Commerce on 16th by no less a person than Mr. Lloyd George himself, who was on a tour in America at the time and was present with Apponyi at the banquet. Mr. Lloyd George said that Apponyi was strong in his arguments because he had every right to feel the justice of his cause.

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