

INTRODUCTION.

I.

HUNGARY FROM 1711—1740.

FROM the time of the occupation of the country by the Magyars until the Peace of Szatmár (1711)—a period of over eight hundred years—the history of Hungary is pre-eminently a military one. The political tranquillity of the eighteenth century contrasts so strikingly with the glorious and passionate struggles of the previous ages that this contrast in itself would suffice to give to this particular period a distinctive character of its own.

The period is inaugurated by two important events, which—while accounting for the tranquil course of development and the results produced by a century of undisturbed activity—explain also the dangers latent in this tranquillity. These two events—the expulsion of the Turks, and the struggle for Hungarian independence of Austria—comprise all the factors which moulded the history of Hungary until 1848. As soon as the lull of the preceding storms permitted an adjustment of the relations between the great political and social forces, they remained unchanged for a whole century until the period of fresh upheavals.

Of these two events, the first, both in order of time and—in our opinion—in respect of importance, was the expulsion of the Turks from Hungary. The whole of the historical literature of Hungary regards it as a fact of practically second-rate interest, and does not consider it to be a fresh turning-point in the

history of the country. Under the prevailing influence of present-day questions, Hungarian historians have been attracted by the affinity of ideas and sentiments more particularly towards the sublime efforts to maintain ancient liberties and to secure the rights of a new faith.

It is in these that the whole power of the ruling class of Hungary manifests and exhausts itself. And these exertions prevent Hungary from fulfilling the mission she was once called upon to undertake, of being the vanguard and pioneer of Europe on the borders of the East. It was a tragical case of the irony of fate that the liberation of the Hungarian soil was accomplished by foreign forces and that the large majority of the successors of the Hunyadis and Zrinyis based their hopes on the victory, not of the cross, but of the crescent.

Consequently, however enormous the political and social effects produced thereby, the soul of the people was not stirred by the liberation of the country and the restoration of her territorial integrity: for the inner feelings of a people are moved and stirred into action only by events in which they play a part. Contemporaries speak in tones either of indifference or of grief of the Peace of Karlovicz, which realised all that had been merely the dream of Gabriel Bethlen, Peter Pázmány and Nicholas Zrinyi. It was considered of importance and as epoch-making for the Turks rather than for Hungary. The fact that it brought the Hungarian Lowlands (Alföld) under Christian rule is scarcely mentioned at all. Isaac Babocsai, the notary of Tarczal, dwells mainly on the grievances brought thereby upon his poor fatherland. Even the stout royalist Michael Cserei considered the point of chief importance to be the fact that this was the first occasion on which Turks resigned their rights to provinces and towns where they had mosques, and deplored the fate of Transylvania, for which no change could be more unfortunate than its union with Hungary. Not the event itself, but the auspices under which it took place, decided the opinion of contemporaries.

The power, feelings and thoughts of the Hungarian nation were monopolised by another life and death struggle. "The old wounds of our glorious country were re-opened. Never was

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there any event that so completely alienated the Hungarians from the Roman Emperor and the whole Austrian Government,—so completely, indeed, that the animosity of the Hungarians towards the Emperor has not yet ceased in this year of grace 1710, nay is actually increasing from day to day¹.”

The victory over the Turks merely served as a pretext and an opportunity for a foreign religious and political system to include Hungary, which it regarded as a conquest, in its sphere of authority, and deprive her of her independence. An eight years' war—(1703–11), this time, however, a civil war—again bled and wasted the country, and was ended only by the military and diplomatic overthrow of the national revolution, an event which coincided in time with the important victories of the Habsburg House all over Europe. This produced the compromise between king and nation concluded in 1711, which proved more enduring than the long series of its predecessors. Just as the treaties of Karlovicz, Passarovicz and Belgrade established the territorial unity and tranquillity of the country, so the Peace of Szatmár settled her internal organisation and constitution.

II.

THE RULING CLASS OF HUNGARY. THE MAGNATES
AND THE GENTRY.

As the state of the country became more settled, it grew daily more evident that her constitution and internal organisation were not menaced by any serious danger—and still less her nationality. The conditions and men of the age of Leopold had given place to others. In consequence of the combined efforts of the prelates and nobility², the national form of government

¹ Cserei, Michael, *Nemzeti Könyvtár* (National Library), p. 50.

² The Hungarian nobility and the classes into which they are divided are treated of more fully later on. Here it is enough to say that the Magnates correspond roughly to the Lords, that besides the gentry (a very numerous class) there were a large number of peasant-nobles owning but a single holding each, and also many nobles with no landed property at all.

held its own against the foreign absolutist and Germanising system, not only in the country itself but also in the territories newly recovered. It is true that such strong bulwarks of the liberty of the estates as the election of kings and the right of armed resistance had ceased to exist (1687). The system of permanent taxation, the standing army, the Pragmatic Sanction, the *locumtenentiale* council and the vacancy of the office of Count Palatine, all seemed to aim at making the power of the king unlimited. Yet all these measures had no tangible results. Not only did the Hungarian organism not yield an inch before the imperial system: it actually gained ground upon it. We must, indeed, acknowledge that this fact was due in part to the religious loyalty with which king Charles III (as Emperor, Charles VI) observed the terms of his coronation oath. There can be no doubt, too, that the course of events was influenced by his foreign policy, the exigencies of which rendered peace at home desirable. But this had been, more or less, the state of things in the seventeenth century too. That the country was now more settled was due in particular to the new element, the Hungarian "dynastic party." After the Peace of Szatmár, the Pálffy, Eszterházy, Erdödy, Károlyi and Batthyány families began to assume increasing prominence. Most of the high temporal and spiritual offices were in their hands, and their estates were continually being increased. In the counties they took the lead either as hereditary high sheriffs or as bishops. At the Court they overshadowed everybody else by their pomp and wealth¹. They felt the breath of the spirit of foreign countries; they were influenced by the favour of the Court: but they remained Hungarians, as is proved by their correspondence, by their testaments, and by their whole lives.

The Hungarian nobility had reached a very important turning-point in their evolution. The seventeenth century in Hungary was still pre-eminently an age of chivalry, both in a bad and a good sense. Its symptoms were: frequent changes of parties, the grossest sensuality, and a contempt for the law, since the Magnates were above all privileged knights. In their fortified

¹ Cf. Cserei, Michael, *ibid.* (1694–99). The person of Count Czobor in particular was celebrated in a veritable cycle of legends.

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castles, surrounded by their henchmen, they ruled practically as independent princes. They were engaged in the affairs of their estates, or at most of their counties. However paradoxical the statement may seem, the country was never so badly off for great statesmen of distinguished birth: only the eminent personality of Nicholas Zrinyi was capable of rising higher and acting from a national point of view. The transitional stage is then represented by the Eszterházys, whose resolute political and religious activity shows unmistakable signs of the influence of the great Peter Pázmány.

After the Peace of Szatmár there was only one law and one army in the country. Neither was foreign to such an extent as to compel practically all classes of the country to entertain the idea of resistance, or sufficiently tainted with the spirit of the Hungarian oligarchy to allow of rebels thinking they might resist with impunity. The magnates left their fortified castles and descended to the plains. Gradual dilapidation was the fate of their dark “eagles’ nests,” below which, in the valleys, rose stately manor-houses, the homes of luxury and enjoyment, in the centre of extensive gardens laid out in French or Dutch style. As early as 1683 the castle of the Count Palatine Eszterházy at Kismarton, which represents the transitional stage between the fortified residence and the manor-house, was erected. Immediately after the Peace of Szatmár, in 1714, the superb manor of Cseklész was begun: that of Edelény was built between 1720 and 1727, those of the Pálffy at Nagy-Gurab and Királyfalva in 1725, and that of the Károlyis at Erdöd in 1730. Consequently the aristocracy renounced all attempts at resistance not only by law but in actual fact. The defence of the country was entrusted by them to the king and his army, and the most the aristocrats did was to endeavour to secure the predominance in the latter. The great merits of John Pálffy are familiar to everybody¹. The greatness of the Festetics family was

¹ The royal deed of grant concerning Makovicza (once a Rákóczi estate) says: “Augustae domui—statim ab ineunte aetate sua pro locorum et temporum varietate atque occasionum exigentia, tum Pacis, quam difficillimi Belli Gallici et Turcici, novissimeque consopitorum intestinorum Rakócziano-Bercsenianorum motuum et disturbiorum temporibus, summa virtute—tanquam Fortes Miles conspicuusque Heros pro Deo, Rege et Patria, adeoque pro aris et focis, domi forisque strenue dimicando,

established by an ancestor of theirs who was a general at that time. The activity of the aristocracy, however, displayed itself more particularly in the field of politics. The great lords of those days stand midway between the feudal lords of the Middle Ages—whose birth was in itself a sufficient guarantee of their participating in the rule of the country—and the modern aristocracy, whose power of acting a part in the government is due more especially to their wealth and social privileges. Their birth, indeed, was sufficient to entitle them to aspire to power, but it was their education which fitted them for government. They may justly be compared to the contemporary English aristocracy, which after a long series of civil disturbances took some time to become reconciled to a foreign ruler. The chief difference between the state of things in the two countries is that, whereas in England the accession of the foreign dynasty meant the triumph of Protestantism, in Hungary it involved the victory of Catholicism; consequently, whereas in England it was the temporal peers who secured the predominance, in Hungary the spiritual peers won the ascendancy. The latter joined hands with the Court, but by so doing succeeded in reconciling the dynasty to the interests of the Hungarian nation and its constitution.

Most conspicuous was the power of the magnates, those few many-acred families; but the sphere of activity of the gentry had its significance. The latter too laid down their arms or took service in the Emperor's army. Besides looking after their estates, they also engaged in the administration of the counties, which, as the bulwark of defence protecting the interests of nobility and nationality, maintained their importance even when those causes which rendered them institutions of such significance during the Turkish wars had ceased to exist. This importance has been recognised by historical and political tradition. In my opinion, however, the county had other significant spheres of authority in the eighteenth century. It prevented the

cum raro fidelitatis exemplo immortalique nominis sui laude et memoria gloriose exhibuit et impendit." June 3, 1720. Preserved in the National Archives. The expressions used in the diploma granted to Count Joseph Eszterházy are word for word the same.

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individual members of the gentry from appearing as mere atoms in their connection with the Court or even the wealthy and powerful magnates. In Poland the nobility became gradually divided into *slahcic-es* (peasant-nobles)—dependent upon the favour of miniature kings—and into *pands* (barons), but although the fundamental elements of such a development were also to hand, in Hungary this evolution was prevented by the county system. In Transylvania, where the county institution was not so fully developed, the conditions were actually far more similar to those in vogue in Poland. As the institution representing the whole gentry, the county stood in the way not only of foreign Turkish and German influences, but of the preponderance of the magnates and peasant-nobles of Hungary. It thus supported the moderate elements in their struggle to maintain the balance between extremes. At its head stood a magnate or prelate acting as high sheriff, it also contained numerous violent peasant-proprietors, but the chief influence was in the hands of the gentry, possessing estates of medium size and representing national and county interests alike, from whose ranks the county court assessors and sheriffs were recruited.

To the county life is due the fact that from this period the chief occupation of the gentry became legal science. It was in the law, stated in Verböczi's "*Tripartitum opus iuris consuetudinarii Inclyti regni Hungariae*" (1514), and in the later Acts supplementing it, that they found the surest basis for their political position and for the security of their property. The exercise of judicial functions in most cases gave the gentry an opportunity of rising to high offices in the State. In general, the distinction between magnates and gentry was still very unsettled, new families were constantly rising into prominence beside the older ones, either by royal favour or as a reward for their particular merits.

In our days a great writer has compared the French nobility before the Revolution to an army degenerated by a long period of peace. Their fall was inevitable, for they were no longer capable of doing their duty and yet imposed burdens on others. Such a comparison shows the capability of the Hungarian nobility to govern and the necessity for their government, for if ever there was a nobility which deserved the name of

army, such was indeed the Hungarian nobility. Ever since it was established, it had not ceased to extend and defend its country at the price of its own blood. Although in Hungary itself a long period of peace had now begun, the Hungarian nobility still continued to serve their monarch in every battlefield of Europe. Ten years after the Peace of Szatmár they actually complained that no member of the gentry was admitted to the army, and that the number of Hungarian regiments was being reduced¹. Civil administration, the estates, the church and education—in a word, every weapon of power and influence was in their hands: they had their reward, for the country was theirs, but they did their duty well. The *perpetuus miles* was unable to replace the *posse comitatus*, and the *contributio* was supplemented by voluntary donations. In France, the administration of the country was in the hands of an army of civil officers, in Hungary of the landed gentry. In France, literature was in the hands of laymen and *roturiers*; in Hungary it was controlled by the Church, which was itself a part of the nobility. In France, the king controlled everything; in Hungary, parliament also had a voice in the decision of affairs of State. In a word, in France the privileged classes were a Gothic ornament which had become superfluous; in Hungary they were the column supporting the whole edifice. In France these classes were rendered unnecessary by the parallel development of the royal power and of the *bourgeoisie*; in Hungary they replaced both and ruled because they rendered service to the country.

At the conclusion of this short sketch, which has touched upon the various events, only in so far as they served as the material for building up the future, as a necessary consequence of what has gone before, the question must naturally arise:— what was the reason that the Hungarian nobility maintained this social, political and intellectual superiority in an age when monarchical absolutism got the upper hand all over the continent?

This fundamental idea, which was general throughout Europe, made its influence felt in Hungary just as much as elsewhere.

¹ Letter written by Francis Szluha (prothonotary) to the Count Palatine Nicholas Pálffy (Feb. 23, 1722): cf. F. Salamon, *A. m. kir. szék betöltése es a dragm. sanctio története*, p. 135.

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Whether consciously or unconsciously, Leopold I and his sons followed in the steps of their enemy Louis XIV, while Maria Teresa and her sons were just as powerfully influenced by the political organisation of their great enemy the King of Prussia. Yet, whereas everywhere else on the Continent princes were enthroned on the ruins of aristocracies and revolutions were arising, in Hungary, despite every attempt to overcome them, the nobility stood unbroken, and did not resign their rights until 1848—and that too in a spirit of self-sacrifice unparalleled in the history of the world.

Ranke himself in one place declares that the medieval constitutions remained intact in Protestant countries as contrasted with Catholic states, where absolutism prevailed. This is true so far as England and France are respectively concerned, but is incorrect with regard to other countries. The kingdoms of Prussia, Denmark and Sweden, which were pre-eminently Protestant countries, soon fell under the yoke of absolutism. In Hungary the Catholic majority did not prove at all dangerous to the Constitution. Nor has the degree of development anything to do with the matter. In Russia, a country on a far lower level of culture than Hungary, arose a species of unlimited monarchy similar to the others—though it admittedly owed much to the aid of foreigners.

Nor can we accept the somewhat chauvinistic view that the reason why the Hungarian nobility could not be overcome was that they were more energetic in their defence of their liberties than the others, and that the spirit of the nation itself stood in the way of oppression. History itself contradicts this supposition. The German historians of the twelfth century reproach the Hungarians with blind subservience to their sovereigns, just as later historians do with feudal licence in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. According to Otto of Freising, the great medieval historian, who journeyed through Hungary in 1147, the Hungarians “are so subservient to their master that they consider it a crime, I will not say to anger him by open contradiction, but to affront him even by secret whisperings¹.” Naturally this submissiveness to the king appeared in his eyes as an

¹ Otto Freising. *Episc. Gesta Fridr. Imp.* I. 31.

absurdity, and a proof of the barbarism of Hungary—for at that time the Germans were distinctly feudal in character. But at any rate the statement proves that we must find some other reason for the non-effacement of the Hungarian nobility.

The great historians of France are particularly fond of showing how the power of the kingship was increased by its appearing as the representative of the national unity. The *bourgeoisie* and the commons simply put the dictatorship into the hands of the king, to be used in the interests of the country. The Prussian kingship also went through a similar evolution. Peter the Great too was a dictator who used violence even towards the people, though he worked in the interest of great national ideals. Even in Hungary there is no lack of examples of the kind. King Matthias Corvinus ruled almost as an absolute monarch, in spite of all constitutional forms; the same may be said of Gabriel Bethlen, however defiant his parliaments might be: and the fact is that these rulers were not only powerful men, but men from whom the nation expected the realisation of its ideals. Consequently one of the principal causes contributing to the unlimited character of a monarchy is that, in the interests of its unity and position in foreign affairs, the nation should be ready to renounce its autonomous rights.

In its struggle for predominance, the kingship did not stand alone. Everywhere in Europe it found a sure and decisive support in the *bourgeois* elements, who, as a result of their wealth, intelligence and tractability, were able to turn the scale. In France, the kings raised the *noblesse de robe*, the officials and judges, to a level with the *noblesse d'épée*, the feudal nobility. In Prussia, the kings were supported by a *bourgeois* bureaucracy. In Sweden and Denmark, it was simply the loyalty of the *bourgeoisie* and peasantry that raised the kings above the heads of the senators.

In Hungary too there was no lack of towns. Burgesses were invited to attend at the parliaments, and the inhabitants of the towns were for the most part well-to-do and thrifty. The number of towns—as estates of the realm—increased. The Parliament of 1715 incorporated a whole series of royal free boroughs, extending the rights of political representation to