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978-1-107-51152-1 - Palmerston and the Hungarian Revolution: A Dissertation
which was Awarded the Prince Consort Prize 1914

Charles Sproxton

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AND THE HUNGARIAN
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PALMERSTON
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REVOLUTION

A DISSERTATION WHICH WAS AWARDED
THE PRINCE CONSORT PRIZE
1914

BY

CHARLES SPROXTON, B.A., M.C.

CAPTAIN, YORKSHIRE REGIMENT

FELLOW OF PETERHOUSE

CAMBRIDGE
AT THE UNIVERSITY PRESS
1919

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PREFATORY NOTE

THE PRINCE CONSORT PRIZE (founded in 1883 from the Prince Consort Memorial Fund) was awarded in 1914 to Arthur William Tedder, B.A. of Magdalene, and Charles Sproxton, B.A. of Peterhouse. Charles Sproxton's Dissertation, which follows, has been printed, in accordance with the Regulations, at the expense of the University. But the Syndics of the Press have kindly allowed a Memoir of Captain Sproxton, contributed to *The Cambridge Review* by his tutor and friend, Captain H. W. V. Temperley, Fellow of his College, to be prefixed to the Essay, and I have added a few biographical data. The Syndics have, also, allowed the reproduction of an excellent photograph of our late Junior Fellow, found among his books, which have been placed as a memorial of him in our College Library. We have to thank the Editor of *The Cambridge Review* for allowing the reprint of the Memoir. And I desire also to express my gratitude to Dr J. Holland Rose, University Reader in Modern History, who acted as Examiner for the Prince Consort Prize in 1914, for allowing me, in looking through the Dissertation for the Press, to refer to the valuable MS notes made by him in the course of his reading it. No attempt has been made to introduce any alteration into

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PREFATORY NOTE

text or footnotes, except where there could be no doubt that it would have had the immediate assent of the writer of the Essay. Even his invariable use of 'English' and 'England'—where 'British' and 'Great Britain' would have been more correct—has not been changed. The German quotations I have thought it advisable to translate into English. More important alterations or enlargements it seemed best to forego, so that this essay might remain entirely the work of the historical scholar whom we have lost and of whom it must form the only memorial in print. His friends had reason for hoping that he might have a share in the writing of the history of the present war; but he has died as one of its heroes.

A. W. W.

PETERHOUSE,

All Souls' Day, 1918.

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CHARLES SPROXTON

CHARLES, the son of Mr Arthur Sproxton, now of Lee Street, Holderness Road, Hull, and formerly of Salt End, Medon, was born in 1890, and educated at the Municipal (Boulevard) School, Hull, where he twice won the Royal Geographical Society's Medal. He entered into residence at Peterhouse in October, 1909, with an East Riding Major Scholarship, and obtained, soon after, a College Exhibition in History, to which study he had from the first resolved to devote himself. His Tutor in History was Mr H. W. V. Temperley, Fellow and Assistant Tutor of the College. In 1911 he gained a Foundation Scholarship, and, having in the same year obtained a First Class in Part I of the Historical Tripos and followed this up with another First Class in Part II of the same Tripos in 1912, graduated B.A. and was appointed a Hugo de Balsham (Research) Student of the College. He had carried off the Gladstone Memorial Prize, and in 1914 he obtained one of the Prince Consort Memorial prizes.

Charles Sproxton, who was in the O.T.C. at Cambridge, received his first commission within a month after the declaration of war. He was promoted Lieutenant in Alexandra and Princess of Wales's Own Yorkshire Regiment in April, 1915, and Captain in June, 1916. He was twice wounded—in May, 1915 and in June, 1916—and was mentioned in despatches in November, 1915, having previously received the Military Cross for conspicuous gallantry and resource,

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in July and August of that year, at Walverghem and near Armentieres. He came home on sick leave in the summer of 1916, and returned to active service as Adjutant of his Battalion. He fell on July 19th, 1917, at the Western Front.

The younger historians have suffered as much as or more than almost any other branch of learning at Cambridge. At least it is striking to think that a small society of twelve resident members is now reduced by one half. It were an invidious task to say which of these is most missed, but certainly there was an end to bright promise of achievement when Charles Sproxton died.

He was interesting because he passed through life with a sort of mild serenity, always wondering but never astonished at what it brought him. Born and bred in Yorkshire, accustomed from birth to the wild moors round his native home and to the stern objectivity of northern character, he was suddenly translated to Cambridge. He came up with a County Council Scholarship and very soon developed historical gifts of remarkable power. The word 'developed' is perhaps misleading; for his mind resembled a cave, which revealed something that was hidden, if you penetrated it in the right way. He did not give the teacher the idea of developing intellect or imagination, but of revealing it. His power of observation was not trained or expanded by his study—study simply enabled scales to fall from his eyes. He obtained a first in both parts of the Historical Tripos, and was Hugo de Balsham Research Scholar at Peterhouse, Gladstone and Prince Consort Prizeman and finally Fellow of his College. There was a sort of mild inevitability about

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his success which surprised those who did not know him well, but which his friends perfectly understood.

His characteristics were those of a nature shy and retiring to outward view, but intense and imaginative within. The freedom and joy of college life appealed to him, for he breathed an air and a life which he had not hitherto known and to which his nature instinctively responded. In pure historical work he made his mark by a fellowship dissertation on the Hungarian Revolution of 1848, on its diplomatic side, to write which he delved deep in the records; among other things, he discovered that a German book professedly based on the British records, which had deceived at least one distinguished British historian, was a forgery. His forecast was afterwards verified and accepted by the Record Office, and characteristically he neither claimed nor received any credit for the discovery. His essay was marked by sound research, historic grasp and a real eye for diplomatic motive. Like all young men's work it offered itself to criticism on some sides, but it was a study of extraordinary promise and undoubted originality. It deserves to be published and, if it is, will fill a gap in our knowledge of the Palmerstonian epoch.

Yet, though he possessed rare historical attainments, I believe that the chief influences upon him were literary and religious. His imagination was almost medieval in its wealth and in its simplicity. Francis Thompson was his King of Poets, who had said the last word in imagery and style. Indeed this writer appealed to him in his moods of mysticism, as well as by his manner. Unquestionably his own style and thought were thus greatly influenced, and a series of sonnets which he wrote, though full of

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originality, bears unmistakable traces of Thompson. In the same way the Anglican Church, with its medieval and mystic traditions, appealed to him as did the Catholic to Thompson. Father Figgis was one of those who, both by writings and personal intercourse, had the deepest influence upon him. He was one who loved mysticism for its own sake, just as he loved style. Words which flushed and glowed or fell like music, a faith which burned and thrilled, these were part of his emotional nature.

His dreamy temperament led him to pensiveness and reflection, and one hardly thought of him as capable of action. Yet those who knew him best could again have told a tale. When on a visit to the Lakes he astonished all his companions by his physical endurance, as afterwards in the trenches he bore hardships without a murmur, perhaps almost without realising that they were such. There were those, too, who heard him speak in the college societies, who knew that his nature contained unexpected fires. Those who heard it will never forget one speech, in which he spoke of Mohammedanism as "the religion I reverence most after my own," or a meeting at the Historical Society in which he poured scorn on the doctrine that "nothing succeeds like success." Thus it was that, when the war came, he had no doubt about his choice. He did not enlist, as some did, because it was a duty, but because he considered it a privilege. In his eyes the war was a holy one because a crusade against evil. Germany must be made to abandon for ever the unblest doctrine that Right was Might.

There is little more to tell, for the rest is, alas, already an old story among our young men, a story of hardships cheerfully borne and bravely modestly

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concealed. Though he was mentioned in despatches for gallantry and received the Military Cross, one could never get any account of the incident from him. There was still plenty of humour left in him; for instance, after he had been in hospital with jaundice, he wrote: "Trench warfare, after the Cambridge climate, is the most enervating thing I know." Yet there was always the impatience to do something. "England is a dreary place now, and I was really pleased when my sick leave ended. I spent two happy nights in Peterhouse, but Cambridge is no more than a melancholy haunt." It was again the old story—the overpowering emotion had made one whose natural bent was towards thought impatient to distinguish himself by action. The Cambridge and the England which he loved now stood between him and France. It was in France that he wished to be, and it is France which holds him now.

H. W. V. T.

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The Essay *Palmerston and the Hungarian Revolution* is based, for the most part, on the Foreign Office records in Chancery Lane; and in every case where use has been made of these records, either in paraphrase or quotation, the source is indicated in footnotes. Not a few have appeared in print before, chiefly in Government publications. In such cases, reference has been made to the relevant Blue or White Books; but, where the printed copy differs materially from the MS original, I have used the latter, and as a rule noted the variation in my footnotes. Secondary authorities have been freely employed, but not without an attempt to appraise their worth as 'sources,' and never without sufficient indication of the use made of them either in the text or in the footnotes.

I have had no opportunity of working in the archives either at Vienna or Buda-Pest.

C. SPROXTON.