

Review of Reviews

A History of Hungary. Ervin Pamlenyi, editor. Translated by Laszlo Boros *et al.*, (Compiled under the auspices of the History Institute of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.) London: Collet's, 1975. Pp. 676.

This is not the first history of Hungary in English but the earlier works are mostly dated and out of print, and even if they are available . . . they are too brief to be of real value to anyone but the casual reader. The present volume is of undoubted interest even to the specialist, enriched as it is with ninety-two plates, sixteen maps, brief biographies of outstanding Hungarians, a detailed chronology, and a good bibliography of works in Western languages. The text itself is a much improved, albeit abbreviated, version of the now standard two volume *Magyarország története* (History of Hungary), published in Budapest in 1964 . . .

With about two thousand years of tortured history to account for, and with a prospective readership that conceivably knows nothing of Hungary, the authors occasionally overwhelm us with data and names, while, as befits Marxist historians, they do not shun broad generalizations and hard conclusions. Their style is perfectly adequate, as is the English translation, accomplished by a team of Hungarian experts and a second team of Hungarian-speaking native Anglo-Saxons. The reader would look in vain for the dramatic historical accounts or colorful human portraits so dear to the preceding generations of Hungarian historians. What we get instead is a conscientious briefing in political and economic history, with occasional and often excellent excursions . . . into social and cultural history . . .

. . . It is with the events of the early 1940s that truth and what the authors tell us begin to part ways; by the time we reach the late 1940s, the parting is almost complete. It is comforting to have Lacko, author of the last chapter, denounce "the enormous political and economic errors" made between 1948 and 1956; but it is heartbreaking to have this fine historian accuse the leaders of the Smallholders' party of conspiring against the nation that gave them the absolute majority of

votes at the free parliamentary elections of 1945, to have him slander the Hungarian Independence party of the bourgeois-democrat Zoltan Pfeiffer as "openly extreme-right wing," to have him argue that, notwithstanding the election results, the Hungarians supported the Communist take-over almost to a man, to have him ignore the show trial of Cardinal Mindszenty and the execution of Imre Nagy, and to have him suggest that the armed Soviet intervention in Hungary dates from November 4, 1956, and not October 23. Were it not for the last chapter—and for some outrageous falsifications in the brief biographies—we could celebrate this volume as the very best and the most useful of all Hungarian histories.

Istvan Deak (Columbia University) in the *American Historical Review*, Vol. 81, No. 2 (April 1976).

Eötvös József olvasmányai. By Miklós Benyei. Budapest: Akadémiai kiadó, 1972. Pp. 231.

The recent upsurge of interest in Baron József Eötvös (1813-71), Hungarian liberal statesman, political thinker and novelist, was undoubtedly intensified by the occasion of the one hundredth anniversary of his death in 1971 Eötvös spent his life expiating the sins of his class, and particularly of his family, whose unbroken tradition of providing servile civil servants to the Habsburg crown brought its name into disrepute. For a long time Eötvös seemed to be largely the property of literary scholarship, and not without reason. His novels possess remarkable artistic qualities, and at least one of them, *The Village Notary*, a panoramic portrayal of Hungarian society in the 1840's, is a masterpiece . . .

His political ideas . . . never gained much support. He was criticised by contemporaries for relegating the cause of national independence to second place and by later critics for the comparative lack of influence his ideas had on Hungarian political thinking. On the other hand, Marxist scholars, until quite recently, have also found fault with Eötvös because, like Széchenyi, he never claimed to be a radical, let alone a revolutionary . . .

Miklós Benyei's painstaking examination of the literature that influenced Eötvös' intellectual development deserves high praise. Eötvös read in five languages and, fortunately, his library was pre-

served. Benyei divides Eötvös's library collection into five categories—fiction, philosophy, history, political science, and natural science—and discusses each category in detail. Evidence is offered by the author to support Eötvös's competence in philosophy (sometimes questioned) and his surprising proficiency in the natural sciences . . .

Lorant Czigany (London) in *Slavic Review*, Vol. 34, No. 3 (Sept. 1975).

A Hungarian Count in the Revolution of 1848. By György Spira. Translated by Thomas Land and Richard E. Allen. Budapest: Akadémiai kiadó, 1974. Pp. 345.

. . . historian György Spira quite successfully describes the thought process and politics of Count István Széchenyi. With great power of expression the author reconstructs—with the aid of his hero's voluminous diary and correspondence—six months in the life of a truly important historical figure . . . Spira also introduces a new thesis that satisfactorily proves the famous count's active participation in the revolution of 1848, his cooperation with Kossuth, and his struggle for Hungary's limited sovereignty.

Count István Széchenyi was an initiator and leader in the reform era that preceded the events of 1848 in Hungary. Not only did he advocate the economic, social, and political modernization of his country, but he dedicated most of his energy and wealth to such purpose. Reform was his vehicle for progress . . . In 1848 the count had not abandoned his ideals but now believed that the process of reform should simply accelerate. As his cabinet colleagues adopted more and more radical measures for the pursuance of a *de facto* independent Hungary, Széchenyi's doubts multiplied and culminated in the loss of his rational faculties . . .

Spira's work, a faithful translation of the 1964 Hungarian version of the same book, contributes to our understanding of 1848 and of Széchenyi's role in those turbulent times . . .

Peter I. Hidas (Dawson College, Montreal) in the *American Historical Review*, Vol. 81, No. 2 (April 1976).

A magyarországi Szocialdemokrata Párt és az agrárkérdés—1900-1914 között. By Dezső Farkas. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1973.

A magyarországi Szocialdemokrata Párt ellenzéke és tevékenysége, 1906-1911. By Lajos Varga. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1973.

Contemporary Marxist historians in Hungary have an avid interest in the period between the 1890s and 1914, a period that exhibited agrarian unrest in a countryside characterized by the extremes of landless millions and giant estates . . . This period also witnessed the birth and growth of the Hungarian Social Democratic Party which, however, was primarily concerned with socialist education and organization of industrial workers in the cities.

The books by Dezső Farkas and Lajos Varga deal respectively with the agrarian position of the party and with its overall political tactics. Both are critical of the Social Democratic leadership, which, torn between faithful adherence to orthodox Marxism and the realities of a primarily agrarian country, alternated between emphasis on revolutionary rhetoric, strikes and demonstrations and a policy of compromises and negotiated deals.

The critical approach is certainly warranted in the case of the party's agrarian policy, described by Farkas in a thorough, scholarly, and well documented, though somewhat dry manner . . .

Farkas's criticism is basically sound and valid in the theoretical sphere. It does not deal with the methods and tactics actually used by the party in the countryside. Such an omission, whether intentional or accidental, saves his book from the pitfall confronting Varga's treatment of tactical issues in the party's uphill struggle . . . Varga has written an interesting, lively, and dynamic book on this subject. He carefully avoids painting a one-sided picture by acknowledging the genuinely socialist credentials of the leadership and the human frailties of the opposition within the party . . . Yet he maintains the impossible assumption (pp. 114 and 186) that somehow a more radical socialist policy could have succeeded in pre-1914 Hungary. In fact, the socialist leadership could be faulted for doctrinaire rigidity, mistaken notions on many issues, misplaced trust in opponents, and occasional tactical errors, but their basic instinct toward caution was a critical choice of self-preservation over self-annihilation in the best interest of the Hungarian working class . . .

In conclusion, both books are important and valuable contributions to our knowledge of the period immediately preceding World War I. However, neither a purely theoretical nor a somewhat unhis-

torical approach can do full justice to the complex problem of Hungarian socialism at the turn of the century.

Gabor Vermes (Rutgers University, Newark) in *Slavic Review*, Vol. 34, No. 3 (September 1975).

The New Found Land of Stephen Parmenius: The Life and Writings of a Hungarian Poet, Drowned on a Voyage from Newfoundland, 1583. Edited by David B. Quinn and Neil M. Chesire. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972. Pp. XII, 250.

Given Hungary's geographical location, it is only natural that Hungarians have failed to distinguish themselves in the area of seafaring and maritime explorations. Thus, discounting a number of unsubstantiated claims about Hungarian travelers in pre-Columbian America, the first Hungarian to visit this continent was Stephen Parmenius of Buda (ca. 1555/60-83), who joined Sir Humphrey Gilbert's second expedition in 1583 and then drowned along with Gilbert off Sable Island near Newfoundland.

But not even Parmenius was an "explorer" in the traditional sense of that term. He was a young Protestant scholar and poet, and an accomplished Latinist, who was drawn to Oxford in order to further his studies . . . Once in England, however, he became acquainted with Richard Hakluyt and, through Hakluyt, with Sir Humphrey Gilbert, who soon persuaded the young Hungarian to accompany him on his colonizing effort to North America as a "chronicler." . . .

Parmenius's claim to fame rests largely on two Latin poetic works in praise of the American expedition, and especially on his long and informative letter to Hakluyt about his experiences in America, which he penned about three weeks before his death . . . Parmenius's description is still valuable, and the two editors should be commended for making it available to modern scholars.

Both of the editors have excelled in scholarship. Their painstaking introductory chapters on Parmenius are the best in any language, as are their meticulously annotated translations of his writings . . .

Steven Bela Vardy (Duquesne University), in the *American Historical Review*, Vol. 81, No. 2 (April 1976).

Xántus János. By István Sándor. Budapest: Magvető könyvkiadó, 1970. Pp. 408.

. . . In this work, Sándor presents a substantial semi-popular biography, giving equal space to Xántus's life before he left America and to his travels in Asia and his museological work in Budapest until his death in 1894. This latter half of Xántus's life is here presented for the first time in book form. A list of Xántus's 243 writings and a number of bibliographical notes complete the volume, which is handsomely printed and bound.

It is curious to note that Sándor's short biography of 1953 gives some attention to a supposed interest of Xántus in the "international workers' movement," whereas his biography of 1970 does not mention this fantasy . . . Aside from revealing welcome ideological change in Hungary, Sándor's later work is a useful, if somewhat turgid, survey of the life of a man who deserves far more attention in the history of science in the United States than the mere bestowal of his name on a murrelet and a lizard.

Henry Miller Madden (California State University, Fresno), in *American Historical Review*, Vol. 81, No. 2 (April 1976).

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