



EARLY ENGLISH TRAVELLERS IN UPPER HUNGARY

BY

STEPHEN GAL

The first record of English travellers in Upper Hungary dates back so far that it sounds like a mere legend.

This record is contemporary with the first contact between Hungary and England — the arrival via the Baltic States and the Kiev Court at the Court of St. Stephen, where they were welcomed with Christian hospitality and affection, of the two young English princes, *Eadward* and *Eadmund*, who had been driven from their island home by the Danes.

This roundabout way was not however the route chosen by the Englishmen who visited Hungary in the Middle Ages. The Englishmen who took part in the Crusades and the members of the royal embassies approached Hungary from the West along the course of the river Danube. The most northern point reached by them was Esztergom, the royal seat of the kings of the House of Arpád.

At the dawn of the Reformation, when the contacts between England and Poland became more frequent, these contacts actually assuming the character of a political alliance, the northern route — that passing through the Szepes (Zips) District — was once more chosen by a visitor from England, one of the most interesting men of his age, a pupil of Erasmus and Melanchton — *Leonard Cox*, who spent more than ten years at Cracow, Kassa and Lőcse as teacher and director of schools there. Cox, the author of the first manual of rhetoric written in English, editor of many classical authors, enjoyed the support and patronage of Thomas Cromwell, Chancellor of England under Henry VIII. It was Cox who diverted the reformation movement of the Szepes District into the channel marked out by Melanchton, thus introducing into Hungary the anti-Luther Latin crypto-Calvinism. His Hungarian pupils included such eminent names as those of Leonard Stöckel, John Sylvester etc.

The Hungary of the days of Turkish occupation — the once feared and respected Hungarian Empire — in the age of discoveries attracted many Western Europeans to the valley of the Danube. Travellers possessed with the spirit of enterprise of the age of the Reformation and eastern travellers touring Europe for the purpose of scientific study all alike felt the spell of the sights of Carpathian Europe, which they recorded with the exaltation of the spiritual emotions that those sights inspired.

This is how *Sir Philip Sidney* — next to Edmund Spenser the greatest poet of Elizabethan England — came to Hungary in the months of August and September, 1573. In his important "*Defence of Poesy*" Sidney speaks very appreciatively of Hungarian poetry: "*In Hungary I have seen it the manner at all feasts, and other such meetings, to have songs of their ancestors' valour; which that right soldierlike nation think the chiefest kindlers of brave courage*". This is one of the earliest — and one of the most distinguished — appreciations of Hungarian poetry in the literature of the world. We wonder where and from whom Sidney heard these heroic songs? This is a mystery which is only just beginning to be cleared up. In the summer of 1573 Sidney accompanied to Vienna his friend, the French *savant* Hubert Languet who was then French ambassador in the Austrian Capital. It was the fashion in those days to make excursions from the imperial Capital to Pozsony; Sidney too went to Pozsony for three days, returning however only after the lapse of two months. He was entertained in the house of Dr. Purkircher, the learned and famous physician; and — a circumstance of even greater importance — he made the acquaintance of Lázár Schwendi, police commissioner of Habsburg Hungary, and of Casper Békés, the antagonist of Stephen Báthory, the Prince of Transylvania who later became King of Poland. At a later date Sidney corresponded with Schwendi, who indeed sent him some books dealing with the castles of Hungary. One of the subordinates attached to Schwendi was Valentine Balassi, the greatest Hungarian poet of the sixteenth century, who was also imbued with Platonism like Sidney, so that it is quite possible that the two were personally acquainted. Sidney in all probability also

visited many castles in Upper Hungary; in any case in his letters he speaks with appreciation of the magnificent Hungarian wine and of the fiery Hungarian songs.

Prior to 1573 Pozsony had been visited by another Englishman of note — *John Dee*, Queen Elizabeth's far-famed astrologer, one of the first dons of Trinity College, Cambridge, who was also an intimate personal friend of Sir William Cecil, the greatest English politician of the age. It was the latter who sent Dee to Antwerp, where he had an opportunity of collaborating with a Hungarian nobleman. The book written by him in Antwerp he dedicated to the Emperor Maximilian II.; and when it appeared, he hastened to the Emperor's Hungarian Capital to present it in person. From 1584 to 1589 Dee lived in the Prague Court of the Emperor Rudolph, who was an alchemist and had a mania for clocks. He was renowned as a magician in his own country too; the figure of Prospero in "The Tempest" Shakespeare is said to have modelled after him.

It was at Prague, in 1591, that a Hungarian met *Fynes Morison*, the veritable "Marathon traveller" of the age, who describes in terms of sympathy the hatred of the Hungarians for the crack-brained despot. On his way from Cracow to Vienna Morison travelled the whole way along the Hungarian frontier, but did not dare to enter the country. He was deterred from doing so by the bood-curdling stories of magyarphobe Viennese; and he writes that "wolves and Turks lay in ambush" to entrap the unwary traveller at the eastern gate of Vienna. Another globe-trotter, *Lithgow*, who — as contrasted with the record of Morison — spent only 16 years (not 32) roaming about the world, in 1616 sailed down the Danube from Vienna and passed Pozsony. In his diary he noted that the Holy Crown of Hungary was preserved in the castle of Pozsony.

In 1621, during the Thirty Years' War, English auxiliaries also fought on the side of the Snow King of Prague, Frederick Elector of the Pfalz. The leader of the Protestant armies was the son-in-law of the King of England; that is why King James I. supported them. The English army advanced as far as the frontier towns of Hungary, where they established a contact with the forces of Gábor Bethlen, Prince of Tran-

sylvania. The English army cannot however have been adequately provided with material resources; that is at any rate the conclusion to be drawn from the verse, still in manuscript, which I have discovered in a small book in the library of the Hungarian National Museum. This verse puts into the mouth of the leader of the English troops a lamentation which tells us that "the scanty stock made it impossible for them to bear the severe winter cold", for the king "had sent this small force to a far-away land unprovided with the means to cover expenses . . ."

One of the most interesting figures of the seventeenth century in English literature is *Sir Thomas Browne*, a man of the greatest versatility interested in everything. Among the books and works read by him we find all those published in his century dealing with the relations between the Hungarians and the Turks. He gave his son a thorough education, sending him abroad on several occasions for purposes of study. This son of Sir Thomas — *Edward Browne* — became famous as a physician. He was physician-in-ordinary to Charles I. and head of the English College of Surgeons. His journey to Hungary was not undertaken merely for his own pleasure; he had been commissioned by the *Royal Society* to investigate Hungarian minerals, springs, health resorts, salt mines, gold and quicksilver deposits. Edward Browne was the first Western traveller to undertake a tour of the mining towns of Upper Hungary, starting from Komárom. He spent the month of April, 1669, in Hungary. The journey notes published by the Royal Society — a book that was much read at the time — contain, not a mere dry account of the natural resources of Hungary, but a vivid account of the life and people of the country. Browne never tires of praising our country; not only are there very many mines in Hungary — he writes —, but also the best rivers in Europe; and there is no other country in the world in which there are so many streams and brooks to be found. "Nowhere in the whole of Europe is there better bread to be found than that we get in Hungary; and this bread is so cheap that for twopence we are given as much as we get in England for twelve pence. The soil is naturally exceedingly rich; and the inhabitants devote much care to its cultivation, particularly

in Upper Hungary." Browne revels in the beauties of the scenery as if he were a natural historian: "There is no plain more beautiful than the Hungarian; and the loveliest scenery in England is a mere promenade compared with what I have seen in Hungary". The abundance of fishes in the river Tisza struck Browne as exceeding anything to be found elsewhere! "Wine and wheat in plenty!" — and Browne continues his humanistic eulogies of our country; and perhaps he is not exaggerating, seeing that he had had opportunity enough to make comparisons, the English of those days being already familiar with the natural treasures of the world from South America to India.

On his grand tour of the districts of Upper Hungary Browne took the following route: from Komárom to Sempte, and thence to *Lipótvár* and *Galgóc*. He then proceeded to Tapolcsány, then via Zarnóc to *Selmec* and *Vágujhely*, and via Nagyszombat to Pozsony. The description of this journey occupies more than forty pages of his book: but I shall confine myself to citing only the most interesting details. "The "Csallóköz" district is a very densely populated island; the most cultured of all the Danube islands." Above Komárom he found a huge fish depot; and a fine wooden bridge between Esztergom and Párkány. "Pozsony is a very agreeable town", with very pleasant buildings and a fine castle and a lovely archiepiscopal garden. Those who desire to see instruments and machines of war should however go to Komárom, where they will fall into transports when visiting the newly built bastions (ramparts); "no wonder that even Sinan Pascha tried in vain to take them". Browne naturally spent more time in the mining towns; he even descended the shafts, investigating everything with the eye of an expert and noting down all he saw, so that his investigations in this matter were published by the Royal Society in six papers. Speaking of the Hungarians, he establishes the fact that, whether Catholics or Protestants, the people he talked to were everywhere discontent with and distrustful of the Vienna Court. And he asks anxiously — "will this not lead to a dangerous revolution?"

Large numbers of Englishmen also took part in the work of liberating Hungary from the Turks. At the siege for the

relief of Érsekújvár, for instance, there were present a whole host of Englishmen who subsequently took part also in the siege of Buda. Reports were sent home from Érsekújvár and from the camp before the fortress of Buda — reports or "relations" provided with large-scale military maps — by the English soldiers. These reports were then published in London. (I propose to deal later on exhaustively with these reports.)

In 1702 *Edmund Chishull*, English Chaplain in Constantinople, was in Komárom when accompanying the famous Vienna ambassador, Sir William Paget, to England from his visit to the Levant. In his diary he describes the famous "stone virgin" of Komárom and reproduces the texts of two Latin and one Greek inscription.

In 1774 the mining towns Kőrmöc and Selmec, as well as Pozsony, were visited by *Sir Robert Murray Keith*, English ambassador in Vienna and St. Petersburg, who in 1792, as author of the Peace of Sistovo, became the apostle of the new Balkan adjustment. At Pozsony he visited Farkas Kempelen, Aulic Councillor, whose chess-playing automat is described in detail in his letters to his sisters. It was perhaps by his intervention that Kempelen's world-famed "machine man" found its way to England and thence to the United States, where in the 'fifties it fell a victim to a great fire. (It was immortalised by *Edgar A. Poe* in one of his short stories.)

In 1792, on his way back from the Balkans, *William Hunter*, an early admirer of the Hungarian people, passed also through Upper Hungary. Travelling from Transylvania, he arrived in Pest, whence he proceeded to Komárom. "A pleasant and well-built town", he writes of Komárom, "with a strong citadel and thick-walled forts. The road from Buda to Pozsony is superb"; he describes it as passing through agreeable and fertile country of ever-changing character. Pozsony in particular captivated him; its situation he finds to be charming, its streets fine, broad and regular, its houses massive. The imperial and archiepiscopal palaces he describes as noble edifices. The castle had been recently rebuilt; the writer tells us that it was then used as a home for twelve thousand students.

In 1793 *Robert Townson* arrived in Kassa from Tokay. He regarded the principal church as the only building worth inspecting; but the building of most interest to the traveller — or at least to Townson — was the "Fekete Sas" (Black Eagle) Hotel. Here the famished traveller was able at last to obtain human food, after having often had on the way to starve in country inns.

Kassa was visited also in 1806 by *Reginald Heber*, Bishop of Calcutta, who had come to inspect the famous Kassa school. He arrived there from Bártfa; and he noted in his diary with astonishment the indigence of the country folk, and in particular of the easily satisfied Slovaks.

From 1814 — after the Vienna Congress — there was an increase in the number of English visitors to Hungary. The aristocrats from Upper Hungary living in Vienna rapidly adopted the most social form of the Vienna anglomania; the first fox-hunt in Hungary was organised at Nyitra; and the first Hungarian horse-race was held at Ürmény. But not merely external English fashions spread rapidly; not only the aristocracy, but the bourgeoisie too shared in the work of propagating English culture. The first English teachers to settle in Hungary functioned at Losonc, Késmárk and Pozsony.

When, in the 'thirties, during the session of the Pozsony Parliament, several eminent English travellers visited Hungary, they were surprised to see the popularity in that country of the English Constitution and of English literature, and of the English form of life in general. The journals, letters and travel notes of Messrs. *Quin*, *Paget*, *Gleig* and *Blackwell* and *Miss Pardoe* are of such importance as illustrations of the West European opinion of Hungary that I propose to deal with them in a separate article. Transylvania and Upper Hungary were the first great nurseries of Hungarian anglomania.

Note. The above article is the *pendant* of that which appeared in the October, 1939, issue of the "*Danubian Review*" ("Early Travellers from Upper Hungary in England"). A few of the data contained in the present article have been taken from a paper ("Magyar vonatkozások a XVI—XVII. századi angol irodalomban": "Hungarian References in the English Literature of the XVI—XVII. Centuries") published in "*Studies in English Philology*" (Budapest, Vol. I. 1936: edited by Professors Yolland and Fest).