

DANUBIAN REVIEW

(DANUBIAN NEWS)

A REVIEW DEVOTED TO RESEARCH INTO PROBLEMS OF THE
DANUBIAN BASIN

Dr. ANDREW FALL
MANAGING EDITOR

Vol. VIII. No. 11.

APRIL, 1941.

Hungary and Transylvania
By IMRE MIKÓ

The Situation of Rumania
By LADISLAS FRITZ

"As I Saw It"
By ZSOMBOR de SZASZ

The Slovaks' Anti-Kossuthism — Erstwhile and Today
By LOUIS JÓCSIK

Hungarian-Yugoslav Connections
By IMRE PROKOPY

The Splendid Work of the Hungarian Red Cross
By GEZA RUBLECZKY

Count Paul Teleki on the Hungarian Government's Work

The Hungarian Foreign Minister in Germany
Political Mosaic

Books

Political Economy

BUDAPEST
V. ZRINYI-U. 1. III.

LONDON S. W. 7
29 ONSLOW GARDENS

HUNGARY AND TRANSYLVANIA

BY

IMRE MIKÓ



Ninety-two years ago — at the time when the Union with Transylvania was effected — Stephen Széchenyi, "the greatest Magyar", told Nicholas Wesselényi, the eminent son of that province, that Transylvania could not live without Hungary or — vice versa — Hungary without Transylvania. And today, when after twenty-two years of foreign rule a part of Transylvania has returned to the mother country, the words spoken by Széchenyi are truer and more apposite than ever. For *Hungary without Transylvania was for two decades the "Great Dismembered" of Europe*, while Transylvania without Hungary, from being the eastern outpost of Western civilisation, declined to the status of a mere western spearhead of the Balkans.

Hungary and Transylvania are united first and foremost by Nature, which placed the highest chain of mountains in Central Europe as a semi-circular girdle embracing the two countries, directing the courses of the largest rivers in Transylvania towards the Great Plain of Hungary, thus making them serve to water the soil of that region. But the two sister countries have been made one also by the history of the Hungarian people; for the Magyar nation alone has since the migration of the peoples proved the only one capable of occupying this living space encircled by the Carpathians, of filling that space and of holding it in its possession for a thousand years. And if we speak nevertheless of a separate Transylvanian soul, that is because in the closed Transylvanian Basin the regional homeland of Transylvania has owing to the quite special conditions prevailing there developed a peculiar Transylvanian spirit, which for centuries acted as a recuperative force on the intellectual life of the Magyars, — just as the rivers of Transylvania have made and are still making fertile the Great Hungarian Lowlands.

Transylvania was therefore not merely a simple province forming one of the dominions of the Holy Crown of St. Stephen; she has on the contrary always acted as an element of fermentation and was for long the last stronghold of Hungary's constitutional existence. After the rout at Mohács in 1526 the greater part of Hungary was for a long period subjected to Turkish rule, while Transylvania became a separate principality. For a hundred and fifty years only the Transylvanian principality afforded the Magyar nation an opportunity to lead an independent State life: and it was the adviser of the first Prince, Friar Martinuzzi, who laid the foundations of Transylvanian policy, — the policy of maintaining a balance between the pressure brought to bear on this small country by the Turkish and German Powers respectively. *The princes of this lilliputian country pursued a European policy.* Stephen *Báthory* brought home to Transylvania the Crown of Poland and wore it as Prince of that country; and the Poles still speak of *Báthory* with homage and respect as their greatest king. The statue of *Stephen Bocskai*, the defender of Protestantism, is to be seen in Geneva in the group of statuary commemorating the Reformation. *Gabriel Bethlen* in the Thirty Years' War secured Transylvania's future, while Francis *Rákóczy*, the Magyar prince who led the eighteenth-century Hungarian fight for independence, endeavoured while in the French Court to bring into being a European alliance for the overthrow of the Habsburgs. And despite Turkish depredations and internal party feuds culture flourished amid the ruins. Every form of Reformation left its mark on the Transylvanian mind; indeed, a special Transylvanian form of religion. Unitarianism, came into being as a consequence of the teachings of Francis *Dávid*, — the Unitarian Church having ever since maintained ties of kinship with the free Christian Churches of Britain and America. Five years prior to the massacre of St. Bartholomew's Night the Transylvanian Diet sitting at Torda declared that „*every one shall follow the religion which he prefers*”. For the Rumanians filtering into the province from beyond the Carpathians the Magyar princes of Transylvania had the Bible and the prayer-books translated into Rumanian. The Saxons settled in Transylvania in the thirteenth century by King

Andrew II. of Hungary founded towns, where they lived as a State within the State. There is a Saxon folk-song which, speaking of the Transylvania rich in iron ore, salt, gold, wood and other minerals, sings of "*Siebenbürgen, Land des Segens*".

But the political leaders of Transylvania were well aware that an independent Transylvanian principality was entitled to exist only so long as the mother country was groaning under a foreign yoke. In his political testament *Bocskai* clearly defined Transylvania's historical mission. That mission was to offer a home to the Magyar State driven out of its real homeland until such time as Hungary should shake off the foreign yoke and Transylvania could return to her place as a country enjoying the protection of the Holy Crown. After the recovery of the fortress of Buda Transylvania too became a province of the Habsburg Empire; and another century and a half passed before the autonomous Habsburg province — in 1848, under the influence of the ideas of liberty then prevailing — was once more able to become united with Hungary.

History frequently repeats itself. *After the first Great War Transylvania was annexed to Rumania without the Magyars being even consulted.* In the words of the Transylvanian poet, Transylvania was lost to Hungarian life as completely as Atlantis the submerged continent.

In the days of the independent principality Transylvania for a hundred and fifty years was the real representative of Hungarian political independence. *And during the twenty-two years of the foreign rule dictated by Trianon, the role once played by Transylvania devolved upon Hungary. Hungary became one great Transylvania; and the place of Transylvania had to be taken by Hungary.*

Two decades are but a brief period in the life of a people whose roots are a thousand years old. The people of Transylvania was engaged in fighting against Tartars and Turks while in Western Europe Gothic cathedrals were being built; and — though decimated — that people survived the pagan whirlwind, which would have swept over the whole of Europe, had the Christian Magyars not held their ground. Compared with this, the twenty-two years of Rumanian rule was merely a passing episode. The Bucharest Government relied for

support upon the Rumanian elements which had originally been settled in Transylvania to take the place of the Magyars decimated during the long wars; but according to the opinion of the chosen leaders of these very Transylvanian Rumanians Transylvania was during the two decades in question reduced to the status of a mere colony. Colonisation of this kind may expect to prove successful where a more cultivated nation is endeavouring to impose upon a nation of a lower order the achievements of civilisation. *But the relation between Old Rumania (the so-called "Regat") and Transylvania looked rather like a Texas attempting to civilise a State of Ohio.* And if there was uncessing antagonism between the Rumanians of the "Regat" and those of Transylvania, what must have been the lot of the Magyars of Transylvania, in respect of whom the then Rumanian Premier told the Peace Conference that he would rumanianise them within ten years. It was not his fault — nor that of the other Rumanian politicians and Ministers — that that was not what happened. They did their level best with the aid of all the weapons of political power to achieve that object. By way of illustration of the methods employed by the nationality policy of Rumania we would refer to three points only as typically characteristic of those methods.

1. The *Land Reform* ruined the Magyar owners of medium-estates in Transylvania and also the Magyar public institutions; for the Churches also maintained the Magyar schools out of the revenue obtained from their landed property. We know what hostile propaganda will say: the agrarian reform — it will say — created a peasant democracy in the areas previously occupied by Magyar *latifundia* and enabled the Magyar agricultural labourers to obtain land. Only — unfortunately for these propagandists — *there were no latifundia in Transylvania*; why, in Europe prior to the outbreak of the first Great War Transylvania followed after Bulgaria and Belgium as the third country in order in respect of the proportion of small-holders, whereas Old Rumania (the "Regat") was only eighth in order, and the Land Reform carried out in that country in terms of a separate law was far milder in character, the passive elements there being of course Rumanians and not Magyars. *In Transylvania, on the other*

hand, the Magyar Churches lost by sequestration or expropriation respectively 314,199 out of a total area of 371,614 cadastral yokes. That means that they were robbed of 84.54% of the total area of their landed property! Not to speak of the grievances suffered by the Székler Magyars as a result of the expropriation of their forest land and their pastures and by the Banate settlers in consequence of the sequestration of their small holdings. And only a part of the land thus expropriated was distributed among the peasants, the rest being retained as a State reserve employed for the purpose of carrying on multifarious dealings.

The second objective of the Rumanian Government was the Magyar officials and workers. After the change of rule in 1918—19 the Magyar public employees refused to take the oath of allegiance to the Rumanian State until the treaty of peace had been formally concluded. As a consequence they were dismissed from their offices; and pensions were paid only to a small number, the more fortunate victims also receiving payment of their pensions after 1929. Those who retained their posts or were later on engaged by the State or by a county or town (parish) were all alike compelled to take an examination in Rumanian, the majority of these persons being then dismissed without receiving any compensation or being allowed any pensions. The language test was really merely a pretext for their dismissal, — a fact shown also by the circumstance that even those who repeatedly passed this test successfully were ordered to take another examination, in the hope that in the meantime they had forgotten Rumanian; and there were cases of female railway workers dismissed from their posts because they did not know what deeds of heroism had been done by "Childe Michael", the Rumanian national hero. And since 1934 the private undertakings too have been forced to employ a certain percentage of "true-born" Rumanians, the result being that the Magyar workers and officials and their families have been reduced to the condition of proletarians.

The third object of attack was the Magyar schools — the attack first launched by M. Anghelescu when Minister of Education. In Transylvania a very large proportion of the schools were maintained by the Churches, which as a con-

sequence of the Land Reform and the withdrawal of State grants had their power of resistance badly impaired. And then a law was passed classifying as private schools the ancient denominational educational institutes of Transylvania and placing them under State control. In addition the area known as Széklerland was dubbed a "culture-zone", forcing the Széklers to build hundreds of State schools — even in places where there was hardly a single Rumanian; while teachers from the "Regat" who did not know a word of Hungarian were appointed to function in these schools and were given special "premiums" as a reward for the work of rumanianisation expected of them. The teachers of the "culture-zone" then failed to teach the pupils Rumanian, though they did succeed in preventing them learning to read and write in Hungarian, this Rumanian "culture-offensive" thus leading to illiteracy.

In the Transylvania just returned to the possession of the Magyar nation we now find types produced by the twenty-two years of minority past, — the Hungarian (Magyar) landowners who have lost their land, the greater part of whom have never attended a Hungarian school and owe what knowledge of Hungarian literature or history they may possess solely to their own efforts.

It goes without saying that the first task facing the Hungarian Government is to remedy this evil. But that does not by any means involve desire on the part of any one to wreak vengeance for what has been done on the Rumanians remaining in that part of Transylvania which has been restored to Hungary. *The Government is elaborating a scheme of land reform which is to maintain in force the social results achieved by the Rumanian agrarian reform; but at the same time this scheme is to do justice to the Magyar institutions and private owners who were illegally deprived of their land by expropriation.* The majority of the Rumanian public employees fled from Transylvania to Rumania immediately after the declaration of the Vienna Award. These men are being gradually replaced by those Magyars who owing to their refusal to take the oath of allegiance or on the pretext that they had failed to pass the language test were dismissed from their posts. And at the same time the majority of the

public employees of Rumanian nationality remaining in Transylvania are still holding their posts; indeed, many new appointments have been made of Rumanians as public employees. The sheriff of the County of Măramaros, for instance, is even today a true-born Rumanian. In the field of education Orders in Council have already been issued granting the non-Magyar nationalities rights far exceeding those stipulated in the minority treaties., while the Hungarian State has established for the benefit of the Rumanian inhabitants elementary and secondary schools with Rumanian staffs of teachers. And that this policy of understanding towards the non-Magyar nationalities will continue to be developed independently of considerations of foreign policy, is guaranteed by the existence of the new generation of Transylvanian Magyars, which, having grown up during the days of Rumanian rule, has no desire to exchange its role of oppressed for that of oppressor. The historical Transylvanian spirit has at all times striven to establish full understanding between the various races and nationalities; it is that for that reason that this country has been spoken of an Eastern Switzerland.

In the days of the Transylvanian principality religion was the leading idea; and Transylvania anticipated the whole of Europe in declaring liberty of conscience. Since last century the leading idea of the age has been "nationality". And now Transylvania has again become a Member of the Kingdom of the Holy Crown of St. Stephen, — the St. Stephen who in his advice to his son laid down the fundamental principles that must underlie the government of a polyglot country. *Transylvania has therefore once more to fulfil a historical mission in respect of safeguarding the rights and liberties of the non-Magyar nationalities.*

The Vienna Award, however, restored to Hungary only the northern and eastern parts of Transylvania. The new frontier today marks on the map of Europe the boundary between Central European and Balkan culture respectively. While on the one hand Magyar refugees are crossing the frontier in hundreds from Rumanian Transylvania, — indeed, Rumanians too make their way to Hungarian Transylvania —, the Hungarian Parliament a few days ago passed a law inflicting punishments of six and twelve months' imprisonment

respectively on any person using terms derogatory to the dignity of any of the non-Magyar nationalities. At the same time an Edict was issued in Rumania declaring that the punishment prescribed in the laws dealing with offences against the State may be at discretion doubled if the offence in question has been committed by a person belonging to a racial minority. East and West are in conflict on the Rumanian-Hungarian frontier demarcated in the middle of Transylvania. *Day after day it is becoming more and more manifest that, just as Hungary cannot exist without Transylvania, Europe cannot afford to a dispense with the economic unity of the Carpathian Basin or with a strong independent Magyar State within that Basin — that State which for centuries was the eastern frontier outpost of Western Christianity and Western civilisation. Once that is realised by every one in Europe, there will be no reason for anxiety concerning the future of Hungary and of Transylvania.*

OSZK

Országos Széchényi Könyvtár