

TWO INTERESTING REFERENCES TO HUNGARY IN EARLY ENGLISH LITERATURE

I.

HUNGARY IN FIFTEENTH CENTURY POLITICAL POEMS

The "*Libel of English Policy*" is an early illustration of England's commercial relations with Hungary and other foreign countries. This remarkable political poem was written about 1436 by an anonymous writer, who evidently recognised the fact that the greatness of England depended on her commerce. Therefore he begins the poem by "exhortynge alle Englande to kepe the see environ" and proceeds to enumerate the various nations which keep coming to England to purchase goods, bringing in return their own "commoditytees".

In a list of curious imports such as "the comodijs stokfysse" brought by Icelandic sailors, Hungary figures too. We are told that the silver and wedges Prussian merchants bring to England have been bought in Hungary:

*"Also Pruse mene make here aventure
Of plate of sylvere, of wegges gode and sure
In grete plente whiche they bringe and bye
Oute of londes of Bealme and HUNGRYE
Which is encrease ful grete unto thys londe."*¹

"*On England's Commercial Policy*", another poem written in the time of Edward IV., speaking of the countries which export wool from England, mentions Hungary too. This poem is an interesting example of rational English self-consciousness, the poet thinking that the supremacy of his country over other nations of the world is due to its commercial wealth. Therefore he chooses the motto: "Anglia, propter tuas naves et lanas, omnia regna te salutare debent." Then he gives a long list of nations which come to England to buy wool:

*"Ffor the marchauntes comme oure wollys for to bye,
Ore elles the cloth that is made theroff syklyly,
Oute of dyverse londes fer byyond the see,
To have thyse merchaundyss into theyr countré.
. . . Castyle, Cesyle, Coleyn, and Swethyn,
Pruse-londe, Florence, Venyse, and Jene,
Melane, Catelony, and alle Itally,
Bewme, HUNGRY, Greke, and gret Turkey."*²

That the poem is not only the poetic expression of patriotic exultation, we know from the fact that England's commercial wealth really depended for a long time on her wool-exports. Already in the ninth century the wool of England was conveyed

to distant Italy. And from the end of the thirteenth century English raw wool was recognised as a regular currency, by means of which even papal taxation was collected. From the year 1315 papal agents were engaged in a regular wool export trade for the papal treasury. (See: W. Cunningham: "*The Growth of English Industry and Commerce*", Cambridge, 1922, pp. 422—26.) Bearing that in mind, we cannot wonder that Hungarian merchants also procured wool and wool products direct from England.

It is a difficult question to decide whether Hungary was put into the above poems in order to increase the list of exotic countries, or because it was known to the poets that Hungarian merchants had really come to England. The above poems however are definite evidences of the existence of *some* commercial relations between England and Hungary as early as the beginning of the fifteenth century. The historical and literary connections between these two countries had been very frequent already in the previous centuries. This is, however, the first mention in literature of Hungary's commercial connection with England.

How do we account then for the existence of a *real* Hungary in literature? When we examine the date of composition of the poems we find that they were written in the last years of the reign of the Emperor Sigismund, the first Hungarian king who went to England (1416) for diplomatic reasons. As the most powerful monarch of the day he went to Henry V. to intervene on behalf of France. (See Shakespeare: "*Henry V.*" Act V. Chorus: "As yet the lamentation of the French Invites the King of England's stay at home; The Emperor's coming in behalf of France, To order peace between them...") He was very "honourably" received by Henry, as we learn from Capgrave, and created Knight of the Order of the Garter. He and his followers took such a fancy to England that they were sorely grieved when the time came to leave the country. The emperor himself said good-bye to the king in the following words:

*"Farewel, with glorious victory,
Blessid Ingland, ful of melody
Thou may be cleped of Angel nature;
Thou servist God so with bysy cure!
We leve with the this praising,
Which we schul ever say and sing."*³

³ John Capgrave: "*The Chronicle of England*", London, 1868. pp. 313—14.

¹ Political Poems and Songs Relating to English History. ed by Th. Wright, 2 vols. London, 1861. II, p. 171.

² Op. cit. II, pp. 282—87.

It is not impossible that it is owing to Sigismund's initiation that the channel for serious relations between the two countries was opened. And it has

often happened in history that political visits have brought about commercial connections too.

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II.

HUNGARY AND A GREAT ELIZABETHAN LINGUIST

In medieval English literature the word "Hungary" has two distinctly different meanings. Alongside of the definite, historical Hungary of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and of Matthew Paris there is another Hungary, vague, indefinite, a kind of symbolic name for a remote country where strange men live and strange things happen. It is this non-descript Hungary, a very fit peg for fanciful descriptions and narratives, that occurs in Mandeville, in Gower's "Trump of Death", in "The Squire of Low Degree", and in Malory, who mentions a certain Sir Urre, knight of Hungary (Le Morte Arthur, Bk XIX, ch. 10). In the writings of John Florio we have a remarkably late echo of this medieval usage.

John Florio (1625), son of a Protestant preacher who had to leave Florence and flee to England, Italian lecturer at Magdalen College, Oxford, later Italian teacher of the Royal family and of a large number of aristocrats, owes most of his fame to his translation of Montaigne (1603), to his bold linguistic innovations and to his probable influence on Shakespeare. His life has been written by two distinguished scholars: Longworth Chambrun ("Giovanni Florio, un apôtre de la Renaissance en Angleterre à l'époque de Shakespeare", Paris, 1921) and V. Spampanato ("Giovanni Florio. Un amico del Bruno in Inghilterra", La Critica XXI—XXII, 1923—24); and his translation of the "Essais" has been dealt with exhaustively by P. Villey ("Montaigne en Angleterre", Revue des Deux Mondes VI, 17, 1913), by A. Koszul ("L'offrande d'un traducteur. Notes sur l'anglais de John Florio, traducteur de Montaigne"; Revue Anglo-Américaine 1932), and by Marcel May ("Une influence possible de Montaigne sur Shakespeare, dans Henri V, acte IV, scène I"; Revue Anglo-Américaine 1932).

Moreover, he is the author of two series of bilingual (English and Italian) translation exercises, highly interesting because of the terse and vivid pictures he draws of contemporary manners and customs (cf. G. Orsini: "L'Inghilterra di Shakespeare descritta di Giovanni Florio", *Civiltà Moderna*, IV, 1, 1932) It is in these social treatises that we come across the name of our country. For instance L. Chambrun (op. cit. pp. 67—68) quotes the following passage of "Second Fruits" (1591): "Thou standest all daye with thy hands under thy girdle; thou hast a Heteroclite and unrulie wit; thou art more slovenly than an *Hungarian* scollian." And Spampanato tells us (op. cit., *La Critica* XXI, Marzo 1923, pp. 122—23) that "nel sesto dialogo dei "Secondi Frutti" Pietro, avendo bisogno di consigli per viaggiare, si rivolge a Stefano . . . P.: "Con chi volete ch'io mi accompagni?" — S.: "Con i migliori e con i virtuosi, perché con tali si guadagna e non si perde . . . ma avvertite che "i don di Spagna, i conti d'Alemagna, i monsieur di Francia, i vescovi d'Italia, i cavaglieri di Napoli, i lord di Scozia, gli hidalghi di Portogallo,

i frati minori d'Inghilterra e i nobili d'Ungheria fanno una povera compagnia".

It is obvious that these allusions are still rather vague and unsubstantial; yet the proverbial enumeration in which Florio mentions Hungary alongside of the greatest countries of Europe is not without significance.

How are we to account for Florio's interest in our country? We must, of course, reckon with the survival of the medieval conception of Fairyland-Hungary in Elizabethan times. (We have an interesting trace of the pejorative development of the medieval meaning in Shakespeare: "Merry Wives" I, 3: Pistol: "O base Hungarian wight! wilt thou the spigot wield?") Florio's interest seems, however, to have been keener than usual, for in the bibliographical list of the second edition of his Italian-English dictionary ("Queen Anna's New World of Words", 1611) he mentions as one of his sources a book on Hungary: Bizzarri: "Istorie delle Guerre in Ungheria". (Quoted by Spampanato: op. cit., *La Critica* XXII, gennaio, 1924, p. 57.)

Is it too bold to assume that this special interest in Hungary is partly due to the influence of Sidney? Florio was the most eminent representative of Italian culture at the English court and the staunchest defender of his country against the attacks of Ascham (cf. Orsini: op. cit., pp. 77—78; for the anti-Italian current see in particular Lewis Einstein: "The Italian Renaissance in England", New-York, 1902, pp. 164—68, and G. S. Gargano: "Scapigliatura italiana a Londra sotto Elisabetta e Giacomo I", Firenze, 1923, 17—19); and Sidney was one of the most fervent admirers of Italy, spent there several months (1573—74), had his portrait painted by Veronese, and spoke Italian fluently (cf. M. W. Wallace: "The Life of Sir Philip Sidney", Cambridge, 1915, pp. 128—40, and Mona Wilson: "Sir Philip Sidney", London, 1931, pp. 55—57). But there were even more personal links, for Florio was the protégé of the Earl of Leicester, Sidney's friend and relative, and the friend of Giordano Bruno, Sidney's protégé (cf. M. W. Wallace: op. cit. pp. 298—302, and Oliver Elton: "Giordano Bruno in England". *Modern Studies* I, London, 1907, pp. 1—24). On the other hand, Sidney knew a good deal about our country, for in 1573 he had stayed here for three weeks; and he seems to have taken a special interest in Hungarian literature, as he speaks in such commendatory terms of the "songs of the ancestors vature" which "that right souldierlike nation" used to sing "at all Feastes, and other such like meetings" in order to "kindle their brave courage". ("The Defence of Poesie", ed. by A. Feuillerat in the "Cambridge English Classics": "The Complete Works of Sir Philip Sidney", 1923, vol. III. p. 24).

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