

FRANCIS RÁKÓCZI II. AND ENGLAND *

by

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The two-hundredth anniversary of Rákóczi's death affords a capital opportunity to deal with the European connections of his War of Independence. To the English reader it is of peculiar interest that the whole course of this War of Independence coincides with that of the War of the Spanish Succession in which the British nation also took part. Although the British fought on the Emperor's side, the British Government espoused the Hungarian cause so fervently and warmly that Hungarian historians have always treated the question with sincere gratitude and appreciation.

So far, however, the War of the Spanish Succession has not found its real interpreter among British historians, for since the appearance of the work of A. Parnell (*"The War of the Succession in Spain"*, London, 1888) — a work now out of date — not a single comprehensive treatment of the subject has been published in England. Even the big History of England which is just being published by the University of Oxford only speaks of it as Marlborough's war; that meaning practically what would be meant if people in Hungary were to call the great European war known familiarly as the War of the Spanish Succession "Eugene of Savoy's War". Seeing that this was only the concluding chapter of the gigantic struggle carried on by the Continental Powers after the Peace of 1648 to settle the question of the balance of power in Europe, we may perhaps be permitted to deal briefly with the Danubian connections of this struggle.

Having in 1648 lost their possessions on the banks of the Rhine, the Habsburgs endeavoured to establish a new empire on the shores of the Danube. After the overthrow of the Ottoman power Prince Eugene of Savoy gave the Emperor Leopold in Austria new territory which was a Great Power and thus rendered him independent of the votes of the German princes. He was not however so completely carried away by his victories as to fail to see clearly that the focus of the new Power was Hungary — a country of which Leopold was king by virtue of the Coronation Oath which bound him to respect its ancient Constitution. Eugene fully appreciated the fact that in the

event of the strengthening of the position of France and of the princes of the German Empire removing the Habsburgs from the imperial throne (there being just a possibility of these princes making an alliance with France against the Habsburgs), the Emperor would have to transfer the centre of gravity of his new empire to Hungary. It was Eugene who first broached this idea; and it was from him that the idea was taken over by Napoleon and Bismarck, who endeavoured to drive the Habsburgs from the German Empire.

The Hungarian nation in every respect showed its gratitude for his having liberated it from the Turkish yoke at the head of the Emperor's German troops, whose victory was furthered also by the armed forces of the King of Hungary and by the assistance of the inhabitants of that country. The Parliament of 1687 made the succession hereditary in the male line of the Habsburg dynasty and by way of showing its gratitude revoked the right of armed resistance (*jus resistendi*) guaranteed to the nation by the Golden Bull (Act XXXI. of 1222). There can be no doubt whatsoever that this great sacrifice was made by the nation because it presumed that there would be no infringement of the sovereignty of the State of the King of Hungary and that the independence of the constitutional Government would be restored. Nor had the sovereign any intentions to the contrary; for then he would not have appealed to the Hungarian Parliament to vest the hereditary succession in the House of Habsburg. Consequently the laws of 1687 were — as their character shows — based upon reciprocal agreement.

However, when the country had been liberated from the Turkish yoke and its whole territory was occupied by imperial troops, the Hungarian forces were disbanded and the triennial parliament postulated by law became a dead letter; while, in the belief that the Hungarian State had in 1687 passed into the hereditary possession of the Emperor, and was therefore not entitled to take up arms against its oppressor the Vienna Government deprived the nation of its ancient Constitution and its liberties and the lives and property of the inhabitants of Hungary of the protection of the law.

Such was the state of things when the War of the Spanish Succession broke out, — a war in which Louis XIV. claimed the Spanish Empire for himself. He was opposed by England and Holland, — the command of the armies being taken over by Marlborough and Eugene of Savoy respectively. Three

* On April 8th it will be 200 years that Francis Rákóczi II, whose war of independence against the Habsburgs during the years 1703—1711 belongs to the most romantic chapters of Hungarian History, finished his earthly career in Rodosto, along the banks of the Marmor-Sea. We deem it very worthwhile to publish the above essay of Professor Eugene Horváth on the occasion of the anniversary, since he is one of the most prominent authorities on Anglo-Hungarian relations.

years later, in 1703, the revolution in Hungary broke out, the Emperor being thus compelled to fight simultaneously on two fronts. For years the most important question which Vienna had to answer was whether the major portion of the armed forces should be sent to the shores of the Rhine or to Hungary. The maritime Powers insisted that the imperial troops should evacuate Hungary, — a course which Vienna informed the world was impossible in view of the fact that in that country the malcontents had taken up arms against the settled order previously existing. This prevailed upon the English Government to instruct its Vienna Legate, (George Stepney: 1701—05), on February 8th., 1704, to mediate between the Vienna Government and the leaders of the Hungarian revolution.

Stepney noticed at once that the revolution had not been organised by malcontents — and not against the settled order —, but that the whole Hungarian nation had taken up arms and that the War of Independence was being carried on under the direction of Francis Rákóczi, who was the leader of his nation. He was of opinion that the insurgents had to be treated, not as malcontents, but as "a people no longer" inclined to tolerate subjection; he immediately applied for fresh instructions, which should be addressed to the leaders and to the people: and he was soon in possession of the "other full powers" he desired.¹

Stepney soon convinced himself that the whole nation was united — "both chiefs and people were cemented like a wall and seemed resolved to stand or fall together"; that the Vienna Government on the other hand was depending upon brute force and oppression ("the true maxim on which they base their present claim is Hobbes's principle, that all right is founded in power"); that their sole aim was the oppression and despoilment of a free nation ("our generals are for spinning out the war as long as they can in hopes of plunder, . . . some of our German ministers are willing to extend an arbitrary power over a few nation." "The Chamber or Treasury is for having the revenue increased by confiscations, wherein several private persons join with them in hopes of having some share in the spoil and are seconded by others who are in possession of grants made contrary to right and law which must be reserved if ever any peaceable settlement comes to be made, for their title cannot be good but by conquest". As a consequence the Vienna Ministers endeavoured "rather to widen than heal the breach", — that circumstance in any case lessening the responsibility laid on the shoulders of the Hungarian nation for the imperial troops having been unable to march to the Rhine. The English Government therefore urged the necessity of an agreement ("the Queen as a Principal Ally, considering the great expense she is at to support the Confederacy, thinks she has a right to press the Emperor with all earnestness not to lose any opportunity of coming to an accommodation with his subjects"). The

Emperor's Ministers accused Stepney of showing partiality towards the Hungarians; but his Government gave him full satisfaction for the charge. In order to prevent the agreement being concluded, the terms already practically accepted were one-sidedly changed, as was reported by Stepney ("the Hungarians were not the only cause of your late disappointment . . ., the true and evident cause was that your Imperialists produced at Schemnitz a new project of truce much different from the overtures which had been tendered in August and with which the Hungarians seemed in a manner to acquiesce").

Despite prolonged negotiations the work of mediation was frustrated. For years Stepney travelled night and day being for weeks deprived of that rest which his office as Ambassador in Vienna should have assured him. After having ascertained the real character of the situation and having convinced himself of the justice of the Hungarians' grievances and demands, he continued the struggle, not only for the purpose of enabling larger numbers of imperial troops to march to the Rhine, but also to enable the deeply injured Hungarian nation to obtain satisfaction and to recover the possession of the rights which had been replaced by servitude.

It was all in vain: after years of futile efforts, in July, 1706, the English and Dutch Ambassadors received from the Vienna Government a definitive refusal. After that had happened, Stepney did less than ever to disguise his conviction, throwing the whole responsibility on the Vienna Ministers ("This is laying the axe to the root of the tree, and any man who has had the happiness of living under a free Government cannot but be a little concerned to see a poor people deprived of their liberties at one blow, and given up to servitude and future persecutions notwithstanding a lowerful mediation, of the same profession as themselves, has been pleased to appear in their behalf". — Report dated July 20th.). The failure of his efforts so completely discouraged him that he begged to be transferred: — "I shall be glad to make my retreat whenever His Grace shall think it convenient that I may be relieved"). When on August 1st. he appeared in the company of the Dutch Ministers before the Emperor Joseph, Stepney said openly that he would have presented the sovereign with a happier Hungary and Transylvania if the machinations of the Emperor's Ministers had not prevented him doing so.² Stepney was recalled; but in addition to her letter informing the Emperor Joseph of his recall, Queen Anne addressed a note to Rákóczi in which she expressed her regret that the mediation had failed ("Mon Cousin, . . . chagrin que nous avoit causé la rupture subite et imprévue des Négociations de Paix en Hongrie").

Stepney has been given a place of affectionate

¹ "Sire, nous osons même assurer Votre Majesté Impériale, que moyennant une petite prolongation et quelques expédients modérés, Votre Majesté Impériale auroit eu le royaume de Hongrie et le principauté de Transylvanie dans une plus grande félicité et autorité plus ample que jamais ce royaume et cette province n'ont été possédés par aucun de vos ancêtres. Mais, Sire, les représentants des généraux et des ministres nous ont ravi de cette affaire si importante et présentement il ne nous reste autre chose qu'à faire desvoeux que les armes de Votre Majesté soient plus heureuses que nos soigens n'ont été."

² The malcontents "deserve both from the Emperor and the Mediators to be treated with as a people no longer under subjection but a nation entirely at liberty to dispose of them selves as they think fit". — "If it may not be convenient to send me other full powers wherein all expressions may be avoided which can in any way disoblige the Hungarians on a point whereon they seem to be so tender."

gratitude by Hungarian historians. He was succeeded by Sir Philip Meadows, who was given a cool reception in the Vienna Court. Queen Anne continued to show her goodwill towards Rákóczi. On December 20th., 1706, the Hungarian Prince thanked her for her letter; while on October 17th., 1708, he applied to the English Queen and sent two confidential representatives to London to be present at the English-French negotiations. These representatives — John Klement and Daniel Jablonsky — appeared before the English Cabinet on April 1st., 1710, being assured of the Queen's goodwill by the Duke of Marlborough and Godolphin, Lord Treasurer.³ This assurance was repeated by Marlborough on April 18th., — a circumstance which showed that the attitude of the British Government towards Hungary had not changed. It was this goodwill that prevailed upon Francis Rákóczi, on August 30th., 1710, to address a letter to Queen Anne in which he painted a touching picture of the sufferings of the Hungarian nation and begged the Queen for protection and goodwill.⁴ Queen Anne instructed her Vienna Ministers, Francis Palmes (1709—11), to enter with energy into the work of mediation. This may be seen from the note of instruction addressed to Palmes (on January 30th., 1711) by St. John, later Lord Bolingbroke: — "Press the Imperial Court with the utmost earnestness. The Queen thinks it impossible by force alone to put an end to the troubles in Hungary. Being a people used to liberty, violence and oppression will never subdue them to be quiet under the Austrian Government, but they may easily be won by indulgence and

rendered faithful subjects by restoring them to their just privileges".

Similar instructions were given to Lord Peterborough, Extraordinary Plenipotentiary, who arrived in Vienna towards the end of February, 1711, and left Austria at the end of April after the death of the Emperor Joseph. On May 1st., on the basis of a promise to restore the ancient Hungarian Constitution the Peace of Szatmár was concluded between the representative of the Vienna Court and the leaders of the revolutionary movement. But Rákóczi was sacrificed for the sake of the agreement; for on the basis of a promise made by Louis XIV. of France he had had himself elected sovereign Prince of Hungary and Transylvania and refused to renounce his sovereign rights. On February 22nd., 1712, Rákóczi left Hungary, for he did not wish to stand in the way of the agreement; and he did not even appear at the session of Parliament (1712—15) which by its discussions rendered possible the establishment of the Danube Empire of the Habsburgs.

Rákóczi was omitted from the Treaties of Utrecht (1713) and Rastatt (1714). He lost his sovereignty; but the mediation of Great Britain contributed largely to restore the historical Constitution of Hungary. Charles of Habsburg ceded Spain to the French prince Philip of Anjou, but received in exchange a new Empire on the shores of the Danube in which the Act of 1715 by the oath of the King ensured the constitutional liberty of the Hungarian State and the independence of its Government.

Great Britain contributed considerably to achieve this result.

guerriers qui ont si genereusement sacrifié leurs vie en combattant pour la mesme cause, ne servira-t-elle qu'autoriser les preparatifs que l'on fait deja pour exposer aux suplices sur des echafauts, et sur des theatres publics tant rant de personnes de la mesme Religion? Non, Madame, l'opinion que nous avons de votre justice nous combatte, et la renommée de votre Clemence s'estant repandue jusque chez nous, nous sommes bien éloignés de croire, qu'elle nous refuse sa protection, d'autant plus, que nous ne demandons ny armes, ny troupes, ny forces, ny prolongation de la guerre, d'ailleurs si presente a vos sujets pour soutenir la justice de notre cause; nous ne souhaitons de Hauts Alliés qu'une charité chretienne et mutuelle que l'on doit avoir selon les loix divines et humains pour tous ceux qui sont persecutés par l'ambition, la cruauté et l'avarice d'une force superieure. La personne sus nommée aura l'honneur de vous représenter, Madame, mes prieres, et celles d'une nation autrefois si renommée et aujourd'hui si abatus par une suite de malheurs de plusieurs siecls; nous paroissions, Madame, devant le flambeau ardent de la liberté de votre heureux Royaume avec une chandelle exteinte, mais encore fumante; nous souhaitons de participer a son bonheur et a sa lueur sans luy nuire, ny le corrompre; sera-t-il possible qu'une Reine et une nation aujourd'hui aussi elevée, que la notre est abaute, ne veuille allumer cette chandelle au flambeau de sa liberté; et qu'elle ne se reflexisse sur la vicissitude et les changements de la gloire des mortels? ne trouvera-t-elle pas plus utile de conserver plutot la liberté meme des nations les plus éloignées que de les abandonner a la proie des Souverains dont il y en a si peu qui bornent leurs ambitions? La confiance que nous avons, Madame, dans la personne de Votre majeste nous persuade aisement de croire des moyens bien fortes de votre protection pendent le cours de la negotiation de la Paix Generale; je souhaite que vos peuples soient aussi heureux apres sa conclusion que vos armes ont esté glorieuses et victorieuses pendant cette guerre, et que vos sujets redevables de leurs bonheurs a votre Majeste jouissent pendent plusieurs generations de ce don du Ciel sous le Regne d'une si grand Reine qui scait les defendre et les Gouverner. — Je suis, avec toute la Veneration, et avec tout le respect due, Madame, de Votre Majeste Royale le tres humble, tres obeissant et tres devoue serviteur, Francois Prince. — A Szerencs le 30 d'aoust 1710."

³ "Tandem prima mensis Aprilis in Palatium Consiliarium deducti, donec Senatus congregaretur in Anti-Camera, expectabamus, unde Dux de Marlborough ad nos exeundo perquam benigne et sane Paternae nos admonuit ut in tam illustri Consessu libere et sincere loquamur, se et Serenissimam Reginam Quietam Gentis summe vovere, et ad eandem stabiliendam cooperare velle. Mox post undecimam horam intromissi sumus, ubi praesentibus ut vocantur Cabinet-Consilariis (Tit.) Praeside Sommers, Duce de Marlborough, Magno Regni Cancellario, Comite Cuper, Magno Admirali Comite Pembroke, Magno Thesaurario Mylord Godolphin Status Principalibus Secretariis Duce Queensburg, Comite Sunderland ac Dno Boyle, Dominus Jablonski sequentem fecit sermonem . . . Mylord Godolffin, Magnus Regni Thesaurarius in haec verba prorupit, ut Serenitas Vestra assecurata sit: 1. Reginam pro Serenitate Vestra ac Hungariae Regno optime intentionatam. 2. Suam Majestatem Sincero corde, quae ad stabiliendam Serenitatem Vestram visa fuerint, et fieri potuerint, omnino praestitutam."

⁴ "Madame, — Depuis le temps de son glorieux gouvernement Votre Majeste Royale a si fortement appuyé la cause de Nations et de peuples opprimés, que l'esperance meme que ma Patrie Conjointement avec moy avons conceues dans sa generosité ne sons pas devenues infructueuses depuis l'acceptation de sa mediation qu'elle nous avoit si benignement offert. — C'est, Madame, a la magnanimité de Votre Majeste Royale que nous devons attribuer les assurances qu'elle nous a souvent reiterées de vouloir contribuer au retablissement de la tranquillité de ce Royaume, et de nous garantir du joug pesant dont les armes de l'Empereur nous menacent. Plus je considere Madame les victoires de vos armes que l'Europe admire, plus je conviens que le Ciel ne vous les a données que pour vous mettre en estat d'appuyer les opprimés, et si vous avez fait répandre tant de sang de vos sujets sur des champs semés de glories pour la conversation de la liberté de l'Europe, votre pieté naturelle souffrirait-elle que le meme sang repandu en orgueilisse l'Empereur votre allié jusques au point de nous refuser la justice meme? cette pieté dis je permettra-t-elle, que cette victime de la liberté de l'Europe efface nos lix et nos privileges, que nous avons herité de nos ancestres; et enfin la mort d'un si grand nombre de