

KING EDWARD VIII'S HUNGARIAN ANCESTORS

EXTRACTS FROM THE FAMILY HISTORY OF THE COUNTS RHÉDEY OF KISRÉDE

Mention has been made more than once in the columns of this paper of the fact that the blood of Hungarian ancestors flows in the veins of King Edward VIII, and it was only recently that an important English newspaper devoted some space to the same subject. We believe it will not be a wasted effort to set down the relevant data for the benefit of our English readers. Here let it be said that these data were not invented by us, but were compiled from authentic statistics published by two famous Hungarian students of genealogy, Andrew Komáromy¹ and Arthur Komlóssy,² in old volumes of the publications of the "Hungarian Society of Heraldry Genealogy".

In the last decades of the XIV century we find the family Rhédey of Kistréde of which Queen Mary's grandmother, Countess Claudine Susan Rhédey (later on Hohenstein), was a descendant in Upper Hungary (today partly Slovakia). The Rhédeys probably acquired their estates by right of *prima occupatio*, as a clan of one of the tribes that took possession of Hungary in the IX century under the leadership of Arpád. The tribe was more than likely the one to which Samuel Aba, King of Hungary (1144—1146), belonged and which was known as the Aba tribe.

The clan which received the counties of Heves and Nógrád as its share adopted the name of Rédei. The first trace of the use of this family name, and the only one in the XIII century, is to be found in a document issued in 1275 to the Chapter in Eger, in which *Rufus Deső* and *Gargyán László* (*Ladislau dictus Garduan*) style themselves "de Réde" after a village of that name.

The members of this branch did not, of course, consistently use the name of Rhédey at



that time. It was only when all vestiges of the tribal system had vanished and when with the cessation of common possessions the feeling of unity among the members of the same tribe had passed away, that we find the surname being used permanently.

Sources of reference mention seven men of the same tribe by the name Rédei, all of whom married and founded families.

1. Demeter of Szentmártonréde,
2. Ladislás Rédei of Berczel, 3 Rufus Desiderius of Boldogasszonyréde, 4. Michael of Kistréde and Szentmártonréde, 5. Peter Rédei of Tas, 6. Garduan Ladislás of Csecse and Nagy-réde, 7. Peter of Boldogasszonyréde.

The villages of Kistréde, Nagy-réde, Boldogasszonyréde and Szentmártonréde undoubtedly existed in the county of Heves as late as the XV century. In the XIII century there was also a place called Alsó-Réde, which was perhaps absorbed by one of the others in the course of time.

The degrees of relationship between the seven heads of the clan cannot be ascertained, for there is nothing in the documents extant to show who was the direct ancestor of the Rhédey family of which they were the seven flourishing branches. Anthony Szirmay holds that *Comes Chobanka* whom we hear of in 1199, and whom he styles "Lord Lieutenant of Szatmár", was the first ancestor of the Rhédeys. It cannot be denied that Chobanka was linked to the ancestor of the Rhédeys by close ties of blood, but Komáromy considers it improbable that he should have been the head of the family (*caput familiae*), if only because no mention is made in the family documents of any sons of his except one, *Comes John*, who styled himself "de Gyöngyös" after his estate there (*comes Johannes filius Chobanka de Gyngus*). Besides this the Chapter in Eger preserves in a work dated 1301 a document concerning the issue of *Comes Chobanka* which utterly precludes the possibility of his having been the direct ancestor of the Rhédey family, an assumption also refuted by the distribution of the land.

¹ A kistrédei gróf Rhédey családról. (About the family of the Counts Rhédey of Kistréde.) Turul, Vol. I, 1883, pp. 119—138.

² Az angol királyné rokonsága. Gróf Rhédey Mihály leszármazói. (The Hungarian relatives of the Queen of England. The descendants of Count Michael Rhédey.) Turul, Vol. XXVIII, 1910, pp. 97—99.

The circumstance that the private documents of the different branches of the family as well as documents relating to the distribution of the estates can be proved to have passed into the hands of Mikó (Michael) of Kistréde and Szentmártonréde's progeny supports the opinion of those who have studied the genealogy of the family that the issue of three of the seven heads of the family died out after a few generations, at least in the male line.

By the time we reach the middle of the XVI century the only branch left is that descending from Mikó of Kistréde and Szentmártonréde, and from that branch sprang the noble family of the Counts of Rhédey. The genealogic descent of Countess Claudine Rhédey from the above-mentioned Mikó (Michael) is as follows:

All we glean from documents of a later date about the head of the family, Mikó, who was styled "*nobilis de Réde inferiori et minori*" is that he lived probably in the last decades of the XIII century.

His only son Nicolas nicknamed "Mikocha", together with his sons Demeter, Oliver, Ladislas and Desiderius, all of whom were nobles of Nagyréde, was involved in a law-suit because of their persecution and mutilation of the serfs.

One of „Mikocha's" sons was *Peter dictus "Mikocha"*.

Peter's son Jacob (1394—1435).

His second son was Nicolas Dosa Rédey who was born before 1414. His wife, Clara Chelény of Szentdomokos, brought him a considerable dowry, but he himself was very acquisitive and he laid the foundation of the family wealth. Nicolas Dosa Rédey must have died about 1466, for in 1467 he is mentioned as the late Nicolas Rédey. He left four sons and two daughters, of whom only one, Nicolas V (1459—1488) had issue. His wife was Ellen Sáry of Misse. The figure of Nicolas V's only son Ladislas II (1476—1536) who called himself "de Mise" after his wife's estate, is very sketchy in its outlines, although he enjoyed a long life. He married three times. From his second marriage with Elizabeth Recsky was born a son, Paul (Paul VI 1562—1590).

In spite of the fact that as regards origin, the Rhédeys were the equals of any of the families of the high nobility, they did not belong to the Baronial class in the Middle Ages. They were stay-at-home men, well-off and honoured, and they spent their lives in adding to their ancestral possessions and in "*more patrio*" lawsuits with their neighbours. County life was their sphere.

But when the Turks, after taking the fortress in Buda, gained a footing in Hungary and the plains became the scenes of daily battles, the Rhédeys stepped out of their country seclusion. The possibilities of a military career presented themselves without their having to go far from their ancestral roofs and their jealously guarded possessions, and, indeed, it was to protect the latter that they took up arms. The fortress of Eger was an important stronghold at the time of the Turkish invasion. It was a strong key fortress

which as Valentine Balassa's enthusiastic poems tell us, was the school where the sons of the surrounding nobility learned the art of warfare. It was there that the scions of the Rhédey family began their career as soldiers. In 1551 we find Francis Rhédey I heroically defending the fortress and not much later the above-mentioned Paul III. Little is known of the latter's life. He must have distinguished himself early as a soldier, for in 1561 he received an estate at the village of Saar from Ferdinand I. Besides this, he acquired land in other places. We know of several of his acquisitions. In 1582, together with George Recsky under-sheriff of the county of Heves, he received, as a reward for military services, the estate of Székegyház in the county of Csanád (Southern Hungary) from Radetius, Bishop of Eger, who was the King's vice-regent.

Paul IV († about 1604), like his father, also became a soldier and fought bravely in the fortress at Eger. We find him there in 1575, when he was given a passport by the commander of the fortress, Christopher Ungnád, and sent to "bring over the "men of Öcsöd". Öcsöd in the county of Békés (Southern Hungary) was probably his already, for his children received another estate in 1610. About 1587 he married Anna Swtha, the daughter of George Csallóközy or Swtha, who had been left a widow first by Kelemen Réghy and then by George Perbes. She brought him fine lands in Gömör, but especially in the county of Szepes, where one of their descendants settled down later on. By 1604 Paul was dead. His youngest son was John (1598—1635) who at the time of his father's death was a minor. His uncle was Francis Rhédey II Captain of Fülek. He was the most outstanding member of the family, and in 1600 we find him in command of a division in the war between one of the leaders of the national party and Moses Székely who for a time occupied the throne of Transylvania. Later on he joined Stephen Bocskay, the great Prince of Transylvania (1606—1608), who was the leader of the Protestant struggle for religious liberty and the Constitution against Rudolph of Habsburg, Emperor of Austria and King of Hungary. In recognition of his services Bocskay raised him to the rank of the high nobility in Kassa on 2nd of May 1606, and as one of Bocskay's delegates he took an important part in the peace negotiations in the same year. Sigismund Rákóczi, Prince of Transylvania, gave him the fortress of Szentjób with its extensive lands. In 1608 he was Lord Lieutenant of the county of Bihar and Captain of Várad. In 1608 King Matthias made him Knight of the Golden Spur. He married Catherine Károlyi, thus becoming brother-in-law to Gabriel Bethlen. When Gabriel Bethlen ascended the throne of Transylvania Francis Rhédey was one of his most intimate friends in the most literal sense of the words, and in 1619 Bethlen sent him with an army of ten thousand to the aid of the Protestants in Moravia. His son Francis III was elected Prince of Transylvania by the Diet of Gyulafehérvár in 1637, but he resigned on 24th January 1658 and retired to his castle at Huszt.

But let us return to John III who was brought up in the court of Prince Gabriel Bethlen and whose chamberlain he became in 1614. It seems probable that he betook himself to Transylvania along with his brothers at the request of Francis II. His wife was a Transylvanian lady, Margaret Kornis. They were the founders of the Transylvanian branch of the Rhédey family. On 12th October 1624 John III received the villages of Petye along with other estates from Gabriel Bethlen. He married about 1628. His wife was the elder daughter of Francis Kornis of Szentpál, chief procurator fiscal of Udvarszékhely, and Judith Bornemissza of Kápolna. With her hand he received the estates of Homorodszentpál and Erdőscentgyörgy. On 16th January 1629 Gabriel Bethlen made out the deed of gift of those estates at Fogaras. Not long after John Rhédey became the procurator fiscal of Udvarszékhely. When during the reign of Gabriel Bethlen the Sabbatarians were being persecuted he suffered considerable losses. His wife Margaret Kornis and her sister Barbara had been brought up Sabbatarians by their mother in spite of the fact that their father was against it. Although both of them renounced their faith Rákóczi had the decrees of the National Assembly of 1638 put into execution in all their severity, and under the title of "*nota infidelitatis*" confiscated all their possessions, which he presented partly to his son and partly to his wife. John Rhédey redeemed the estates of Homorodszentpál and Szentgyörgy. For the latter he paid, on 23rd January 1645, the sum of 3000 florins into the treasury of the Prince. On May 1st 1651 George Rákóczi II signed the deed of gift of the above-mentioned estates. The estate of Erdőscentgyörgy extended to Maros-Udvarhelyszék and to the county of Küküllő and formed the most important part of the family possessions.

By 1653 John Rhédey was no longer in the land of the living.

His eldest son, John IV († 1686) who lived at Erdőscentgyörgy married Elizabeth Macskássy.

His third son, Ladislas V († 1772) married Mária Toroczky. One of his sons, John V was a general in 1765 and at the same time a lieutenant in the regiment of Hungarian Noble Guards which had been created not long before. In 1750 he fought in Lower Silesia, and in 1756 he distinguished himself so markedly at the siege of Schweidnitz that he won the Order of Marie Thérèse. As lieutenant of the Noble Guards he lived constantly in Vienna, but often visited his estates in Hungary. We have his letters to his younger brother and to his overseer. He always wrote in the purest Hungarian. The atmosphere of the Vienna Court was powerless to turn his head, although he was a *persona grata* with the great Queen. When in 1767 he felt death approaching he begged the Queen to absolve him, on the strength of documents submitted, of his duties as lieutenant of the Guard. Marie Therese wrote his absolution with her own hand and advised him "for the sake of his soul's salvation" to become a Roman Catholic. With deep respect but in firm words he refused to accept the Royal advice. He died on 10th January 1768 at Vienna in the rank

of a lieutenant-general. He left a great fortune behind him, chiefly in cash. Being without a family his brothers inherited it. As Ladislas VI had two unfortunate lunatic sons and Adam and Francis died without children, the whole of the gigantic fortune was inherited by Michael.

Michael IV († 1791), who together with his brothers received the title of Count from Marie Thérèse, had three sons by his wife Baroness Sophie Bánffy — Michael, Ladislas and Francis.

Ladislas VI (1775—1835) married Baroness Agnes Inczedy. Their daughter was Countess Claudine Susan Rhédey (1812—1841), the grandmother of Queen Mary.

She contracted a morganatic marriage with the Duke Alexander of Württemberg, son of Louis of Württemberg and cousin of William, King of Württemberg. Alexander of Württemberg was at that time a colonel in an Austrian Hussar regiment. On 16th May 1835 the Countess received the Austrian title of Countess Hohenstein and the children of the marriage, a boy and two girls, went by the name of Hohenstein till 1863 when William of Württemberg gave them the ancient title of Duke and Duchesses of Teck. Countess Claudine Rhédey died at the age of twenty-nine, after six and a half years of married life. Hers was a tragical death, and rumour made it out to be more so than it really was. In a short time the legend grew that the beautiful young woman who was passionately fond of riding and often accompanied her husband to manoeuvres had been thrown by her horse and that the galloping horses of her husband's Hussar regiment had trampled her to death. The falseness of this report is best proved by the memoirs of Ladislas Kozma, the family solicitor of the Rhédeys. According to his account, the Countess died on 1st October in Pettau, Styria, after a severe illness of eight days' duration. She had spent the greater part of the summer with her family and her mother in Erdőscentgyörgy (Marosszék, Transylvania). Alexander of Württemberg, who by that time was a major-general and commander of a division stationed at Grac, was called in for the manoeuvres in Styria, and left Transylvania before her. The Countess and the children followed him in September. On the last day of the journey their carriage was thrown into the ditch near Grac, and the Countess who was about to become a mother got a bad knock on the side. In spite of this she continued her journey and next day left Grac on horseback accompanied by a friend, the Countess Török whose husband Count Nicolas Török was a captain of the Hussars, to visit her husband. After a fatiguing ride of eight hours they reached Pettau. The Princess took to bed immediately and died eight days later, on 1st October. In compliance with her wishes her body was taken to Erdőscentgyörgy, where she was buried on 21st October in the family vault of the Rhédeys under the same Calvinist church where on 21st September she was baptized Claudine Susan. The express letter sent by the Gubernatorial Office in Styria to the Gubernatorial Office in Transylvania merely states with official brevity that

the body might be conveyed home, but does not mention the cause of death. In the Calvinist registry of deaths at Erdőszentgyörgy the cause of death is described as "premature childbirth".

Alexander of Württemberg, who lived to the age of eighty-one and died as a retired general of the Hussars, cherished to the end the memory of his beautiful young wife. Their only son, *Francis, Duke of Teck*, also revered the memory of his parents, and when his first child, the Duchess Victoria Mary, was christened, she received among her numerous Christian names those of her Hungarian grandmother Claudine and her great-grandmother Agnes. His son Adolph, who was born in 1868, received in baptism amongst others the name of Ladislas in memory of his Hungarian great-grandfather. Queen Mary, who was a posthumous child, showed her respect for the memory of her grandmother by ordering a beautiful marble monument, which was placed over the tomb of the Countess Claudine in the Calvinist church at Erdőszentgyörgy in the May of 1905.

In conclusion let it be said that the Rhédeys of Kistréde *de genere* Aba were raised to the rank of Counts on three occasions. Francis Rhédey, Prince of Transylvania, and his son Ladislas were made Counts in 1659 by Leopold I, but Ladislas died childless in 1663 or 1664 and being the only

son of his father who died in 1667, the first branch of the family to receive the title of Count died out.

A member of the Hungarian branch of the family which still exists in Szatmár was the next to receive the title, Louis Rhédey, locumtenens of the Lord Lieutenant of the country of Bihar, was created Count in 1808 by Francis I. He also died without children so that the title died out again in the first generation.

As has been said already, six members of the Transylvania branch, Ladislas, John, Michael, Joseph, Paul and Sigismund Rhédey were made Counts by Marie Therèse on 13th November 1774. The title, however, died out with four of these, who either died childless or whose children died leaving no successors. From then on there were only two titled branches, that of Joseph and that of Michael. The last male descendant of Count Joseph Rhédey's branch was Adam Rhédey, who was the Keeper of the Treasury in Transylvania. He died in 1849. The male branch of Count Michael Rhédey's family from which Queen Mary is descended died out in Count Gabriel Rhédey, a cousin of the Countess Claudine. With the death on 21st April 1897 of this last male descendant of the Rhédeys in Transylvania, the Rhédey family has become extinct.

P O L I T I C A L M O S A I C

TOWARDS A NEW ERA ?

The session of the League of Nations just over was rich in events. Since a long time public opinion all the world over has not been directed with such tense attention and, let us add, with so much anxiety towards the deliberations and resolutions of that great authoritative body as in the past weeks. The high tension of the international atmosphere, the consequences of the Italo-Abyssinian conflict, sanctions, the question of the Dardanelles, the new agreement of the Locarno Powers in preparation, the Danzig affair, Germany's behaviour, and above and beyond all, the reform of the League of Nations on the eve of which we stand are, in aggregate and separately, problems so grave that to achieve even a semi-successful solution of them needs time and a sound nervous system.

The harassed, impatient nations of the world, who are thirsting for peace, have not much of either in great abundance. Their time has almost run down in a barren waiting during the empty years following the peace treaties; their nervous systems have been worn out by having to be constantly on the alert in readiness for war, by uncertainty and disappointments. And it is doubtful whether their politicians and statesmen are better off as regards time and nerves than the peoples themselves. After all these politicians and statesmen are but the projections, the forms of expression of the public feelings and opinions behind them, and they cannot detach themselves from the communities which not only inform their moods, but often also supply them with instructions.

And the nations of the world are tired. They are tired of the numerous political formulas and empty, seemingly useless, *par force* political activity, which instead of bringing the world nearer to the ideals represented by the League of Nations, have thrust it farther away from them than ever. Yet these ideals might be attained, realized, and charged with the forces of practical life. All that is needed is a sincere desire for justice and the elimination from international relations of supramatic egoism. All that must be done is to use this simple and natural "charm", and natural, logical solutions will appear of themselves, as if springing out of the very earth at our feet.

Has the last session of the League of Nations taken any serious steps in this direction? Has the League made any attempt, after sixteen years of painful shilly-shallying, to find itself at last? Dare it touch questions that hitherto have been avoided and can it become the League, not only of the victors, but also of the vanquished?

There are decidedly promising signs that this process has set in. These hopeful symptoms, however, are more or less confined to negatives. The sanctions imposed on Italy under Article 16 of the League Covenant have been withdrawn. It was Great Britain, herself, who took the first step in this direction, and the gesture undoubtedly did much to create the spirit of compromise with the help of which the possibility of a door being opened towards a reformation of the League Covenant has been assured.