

Preface

Professor George Barany has written a big and important book about the "father" of Hungarian nationalism, Count Stephen Széchenyi.

Westerners know too little about Széchenyi, a great Hungarian and a great man. Barany makes a contribution to their knowledge and, it is likely, to Hungary's and the world's knowledge of Széchenyi as well. Barany does more. He makes a contribution to our knowledge of nationalism. His book is based on sustained, thorough, and exhaustive research in the archives and libraries of France, Austria, England, the United States, the Vatican, and Sweden, and on materials from Hungary. He has uncovered new sources and on the basis of these he reaches different if not always new conclusions of major importance for understanding the history of central Europe.

This is not all. In lucid English (his second and adopted language) he skillfully handles the evidence in the voluminous materials in several languages on his subjects, Széchenyi and nationalism, and as he does so he presents a new information on European diplomacy in and about the Habsburg Empire as well as on the flow and interchange of ideas in Europe and even America.

Though Barany deeply admires his hero, Széchenyi, he not only analytically describes his successes and strengths but critically examines his failures and weaknesses, even his hypocrisies. Thus he is able to arrive at a rare balance of judgment on controversial issues.

As Professor Barany says, Széchenyi, a rich aristocrat and one-time soldier, considered himself above all a Magyar, gave his loyalty to the Habsburg dynasty, and preferred order to revolution. Yet he was also an internationalist, opposed oppression of other nationalities in Hungary, admired England—its government and its economic institutions—and pushed Hungary into the mainstream of European development with his innovative ideas in bridge, road and railway building, in horse racing and breeding, and in the establishment of the Hungarian casino (club).

Torn between the old tenacious Hungarian world of aristocracy and

feudal privilege and the nascent world of liberalism and industrialism, Count Széchenyi suffered great tensions. He found partial release in his manifold activities. But in his public as well as private life he went from one crisis to another, often contemplated taking his own life, and finally, indeed, did so.

Generally a believer in progress, he was at times profoundly pessimistic. Most often he arrived at an equivocal middle-of-the-road position, only to be bitterly criticized by the reactionary Metternich and opposed by more liberal Hungarians such as Kossuth. He became a "monument" of the Hungarian nation but never its political leader.

Professor Barany was educated in Hungary and the United States. His education in Hungary (Szeged) was not quite completed in 1944 when he, a Jew, was sentenced by the Nazis to hard labor on the Russian front. After three years in a Russian prison camp, he returned to Hungary in 1947 to complete his education and find employment. In the late fall of 1956 he arrived in the United States (Camp Kilmer, New Jersey) with "two handbags." At this point the writer of this Preface, then Executive Secretary of the American Historical Association, was able to suggest that he study with Professor S. Harrison Thomson at the University of Colorado. At Colorado he obtained his Ph.D. in 1960 with a fine dissertation on Széchenyi, which, much amplified, has become this book. At the University of Denver since 1960, he has established a remarkable reputation as a teacher and producing scholar.

When Professor Barany asked me if I would write the Preface to this book, I at first thought I should decline for I knew so little of Hungarian history. But I agreed because I was a friend, a fellow historian, and fellow student of nationalism, and because I knew that I would learn much from his book about nationalism, Széchenyi, and Hungary.

I have learned much.

Barany shows, for example, with irrefutable evidence, that nationalism has aristocratic as well as bourgeois origins and that an aristocrat could be deeply committed to and involved in the economic changes leading to modernity. He reveals, too, the torture and anguish of a dreamer who tried to act during times of great stress, and thus teaches us (cold comfort though this be) that men before us have lived in times of anxiety and have, however tragic the human condition, continued to dream.

BOYD C. SHAFER