

## Accounts and Images of English Unitarians on Transylvania Three Visits: 1859–1879

A special branch of comparative literature and the history of ideas is concerned with the travel-diaries or accounts of writers: it investigates the image of a nation in the eyes of visitors.<sup>1</sup> The authors of the following accounts, however, are neither literary, nor historically well-known figures — all of them are English Unitarian ministers or theologians who paid official visits to Transylvania in the course of the second half of the 19th century. Unfortunately, the accounts of their journeys have either been unknown or just neglected though they deserve a significant place among studies of Anglo–Hungarian relations.<sup>2</sup>

### On Unitarianism

Since my paper is concerned with a chapter of Transylvanian and English Unitarian connections, I find it necessary to point out the unique parallel of the same religious and intellectual movement in East-Central Europe and the English-speaking countries: Britain and North America.

The origins of the movement have become a centre of interest for scholars recently: an international colloquium was organized on the 400th anniversary of the death of Ferenc Dávid, the founder and martyr of Transylvanian Unitarianism, in Siklós, May 15–19, 1979 with the title: “*Antitrinitarianism in the Second Half of the 16th century*”.<sup>3</sup> The religious turmoil of the 16th century resulted in the temporary victory of the deniers of the dogma of the Holy Trinity and that of the deity of Christ, in the court of the Transylvanian Prince John Sigismund in the 1560s. Ferenc Dávid was not the only founder of the movement; he was influenced by contemporary European radical, heretic thinkers like Giorgio Blandrata, a physician of Italian origin, Johannes Sommer, Jacobus Palaeologus and Matthias Vehe-Glirius, etc.<sup>4</sup> Unlike Polish antitrinitarianism which had flourished in the 16th century too, Transylvanian Unitarianism did not perish from the religious map of Europe, because the movement soon became institutionalized by the famous *Tolerance Act* of Torda, issued in 1568, according to which, Unitarianism became one of the four received religions of Transylvania (together with the Catholics, Lutherans and the Calvinists). After the death of John Sigismund (or John II., the only Unitarian King in history) the followers of the denomination were persecuted by the Catholic and the Calvinist Princes. After the age of Ferenc Dávid the other peak in their history is the second half of the 19th century when their liberal doctrines coincide with political Liberalism.

As far as the character or the essence of Unitarianism is concerned it is a fairly accepted opinion that the movement was not only a product of Reformation but that of Humanism as well, since their theorists and theologians held very often worldly professions too: several of them were physicians. The main values of the movement are the “unquenchable thirst for justice” and “tolerance towards the ideas of others”.<sup>5</sup> Another 20th century interpretation of Unitarianism suggests that the “parents” of the movement be Christianity and Science and its “tutor” Enlightenment.<sup>6</sup> Early 20th century Unitarianism seems to break with the traditional biblicism and turn to contemporary American theologians who teach that the real essence of Unitarianism is the teaching about the value and the destination of *man*. Namely, that man is endowed with freedom, possibility and ability for his own justification, according to the idea of “salvation by character”.<sup>7</sup> This

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teaching seems to radically contradict both the age-old Christian-Catholic dogma of Original Sin, both the Protestant doctrine on Predestination.

In the course of the 17th century Unitarianism (also called Socinianism) "quietly penetrated England".<sup>8</sup> Although there were several individual heretic thinkers denying the dogma of the Holy Trinity in the age of the English Renaissance,<sup>9</sup> nevertheless, the father of English Unitarianism is John Biddle (1615–1662) whose followers were persecuted as "Arians". The *Toleration Act* of 1689 excluded Antitrinitarians and the *Blasphemy Act* in 1698 was issued against them. This Act was withdrawn only in 1813. English Unitarianism can boast of such eminent predecessors as John Locke, Isaac Newton and John Milton. The church organizers were Theophil Lindsay (1723–1808) and Joseph Priestley (1735–1804), the latter one was forced to emigrate to North America because of his sympathy with the French Revolution. In the 19th century James Martineau (1805–1900) was the famous leading theologian and philosopher of the age.

From the end of the 18th century North America became the home for Unitarian ideas; their most outstanding personalities are E. W. Channing (1780–1842), Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882) the famous essayist and the leader of the "Transcendentalist movement" and Theodor Parker (1810–1860). All of them influenced contemporary European thinking, e.g. Tolstoy.

On the whole we can accept the opinion of *The Encyclopedia Americana*: "The Unitarian churches with their emphasis on a practical religion should suit the English mind but since they are dissenting churches . . . they are weak in numbers, although their influence is out of all proportion to their size."

Last but not least it is to be mentioned that there had always been a sort of "Anglomania" in Transylvania.<sup>10</sup> Prince Gábor Bethlen set up scholarship for Calvinist students to study in England already in 1625. The Unitarians had always respected their co-religionists in England: several Unitarian books were sent to England from the 16th century onwards, later wandering students (peregrinators) sailed from Universities of Holland for the English shore. The Transylvanian and English Unitarian Churches had been on friendly terms since 1821: such eminent Hungarians represented Transylvanian Unitarianism as Sándor Bölöni Farkas in 1831, József Jakab (the brother of the historian Elek Jakab) in 1848; and from the English side Sir John Bourving<sup>11</sup> was in intensive correspondence with the Transylvanians.<sup>12</sup>

The failure of the revolution and war for independence of 1848–49 was followed by a long silence and in that threatened atmosphere all the initiatives to re-enter into relationship with the English Unitarians were cut down until 1857, when the Austrian Government by insidious means attempted to reduce the number of Protestant schools and wanted to decrease the teaching staff of the Unitarian College in Kolozsvár. Then with the help of their patron, the English born land-owner and physician John Paget (1808–1892) they appealed to the *British and Foreign Unitarian Association* (founded in 1825) for financial help. (Paget settled down in Transylvania after marrying Countess Polyxenia Wessclényi. He is the author of *Hungary and Transylvania* 2 Vols, 1839).<sup>13</sup> The following year the secretary of the BFUA, Rev. Edward Tagart visited Transylvania. He came to consider the opportunities for raising a foundation for Transylvanian students to study in England. However, he died on the way back in Brussels and the recollections of his visit was written for the *Christian Reformer* by John Paget.<sup>14</sup>

In order to recover the information lost by the sudden death of Tagart, the BFUA commissioned Alfred Steinthal a Unitarian minister from Liverpool to visit Transylvania more completely. This visit took place in 1859.

Unitarians, whose organized church had for long been regarded as one "born out of heresy", were not only tolerated in Victorian Britain but their liberal doctrines and

openness to worldly values struck a receptive chord in the atmosphere of political and intellectual Liberalism of those days. Social Liberalism fostered the growth of Unitarianism and vice versa: the impact of the Unitarians was always a stimulating factor in political life.

The three visits we shall concern ourselves with took place at the end of three succeeding decades: in 1859, 1868 and 1879. Beyond promoting the development of their poor co-religionists in Transylvania, Steinthal's, John James Taylor's and Andrew Chalmers' visits coincided with three crucial points of political history: the *Austro-Italian War*, the *Compromise of 1867* and the *Russian-Turkish war*.

Their official reports never fail to include a moral and emotional commitment to the cause of Hungarian liberty and independence.

#### The Twofold Mission of Alfred Steinthal: Kossuth's Secret Agent in Transylvania in 1859

Studying relations in the field of the history of ideas has a special relevance for the discipline of history when visits, apparently motivated by ideological partnership, are, in a hidden way interwoven with the current political events of the age.

The twofold mission of Alfred Steinthal to Hungary and Transylvania forms the most interesting and valuable chapter in the relations of English and Transylvanian Unitarians.

According to recent research in the National Archives of Budapest, Steinthal was not only the representative of the English Unitarians but as the secret agent of Kossuth he was called upon to pave the way for the impending Hungarian revolution of 1859.

In order to understand this exciting activity, I shall allow myself a short digression and introduce contemporary political events.

During the *Austro-Italian war* of 1859, France sided with the Italians: therefore Emperor Napoleon III entered into negotiations with the emigré Kossuth. The possibility of organizing an unexpected Hungarian uprising that would divide the Austrian troops between the Italian battle-line and the territory of Hungary was under discussion. But as György Szabad points out Kossuth demanded from the very first moment of the negotiations that the Hungarian uprising should not serve merely as a means of dividing the Austrian troops: the total liberation of Hungary is to be organized.<sup>16</sup>

Kossuth therefore travelled under the pseudonym of George Brown to Paris — as he describes it in his *Irataim az emigrációból* (My Papers from the Emigration) — and he negotiated far into the night with the Emperor on the possibility of a Hungarian revolt and on ways of keeping British foreign policy neutral in the question.<sup>16</sup>

Kossuth had to prepare the revolution in three different arenas: in England by his impact on public opinion, in Genoa, Italy and of course in Hungary. It was to the mutual interest of Napoleon and Kossuth to bring about British neutrality.

After the negotiations with the Emperor, Kossuth and the other emigrés organized a "*Comité National Hongrois*" in Genoa of which he became the president, with General Klapka and Count László Teleki as members.

We learn from Kossuth's manuscript "Instructions" that they planned the immediate organization of a well-equipped army, which would have entered the territory of Hungary with the allied French troops.<sup>17</sup>

The third front of Kossuth's far-reaching concept was the preparation of Hungarian public opinion for his imminent homecoming. Besides the above-mentioned "Instructions", Kossuth sent home two other directives: the first, entitled *Tájékoztás* (Information) of February 25, 1859 was later published in his *Irataim az emigrációból*, the other

one, entitled *Pro Memoria* written on April 14 of the same year in English, however has neither been translated, nor even published as far as I know.<sup>18</sup>

It was Alfred Steinthal, the Unitarian minister from Liverpool who was asked to memorize the words of Kossuth's *Pro Memoria* and to communicate it to certain Hungarian personalities.

The question is how Steinthal came into contact with Kossuth. The view has been held that Steinthal was recommended to Kossuth by the emigré Ludwig Csernátóy two days before his departure on April 14 1859.<sup>19</sup> In his other letter written on the following day Csernátóy enumerates several reliable Hungarian personalities who could be counted upon in the event of an uprising.<sup>20</sup> According to Jenő Koltay-Kastner it was Csernátóy who introduced Steinthal to Kossuth.<sup>21</sup> In the National Archives, however I found another letter dated January 14 1859, in which the idea of a sort of mission is already being hinted at: the person who recommends Steinthal to Kossuth is a certain W. Bawlin. (Manuscript handwriting unclear.) Here Steinthal outlines his plans and in a very cautious way he remarks: "the thing may perhaps be done". By his allusion to an "extra-expense" it can be supposed that Steinthal was financially supported. He gives voice to some hesitation but at the end concludes: "You may however rely upon my earnest desire to do all that is in my power."<sup>22</sup> What was the content of this *Pro Memoria* that Steinthal had to learn by heart and to communicate to certain persons in Hungary? Kossuth scribbled a few words on the cover of this manuscript and the same train of thought was elaborated in his published *Irataim* . . .:<sup>23</sup> "Since I wanted to have my countrymen know the situation abroad, I sent an English Unitarian minister to my country: he also spoke German and had at the same time a denominational mission to Transylvania. He was commissioned to recite the contents to certain personalities of Pest and Transylvania and to feel out the general mood and the way of thinking of some eminences in clubs and social gatherings. He went about his commission with particular care." (Transl. mine: T. F. F.)

In his *Pro Memoria* Kossuth emphasizes that in his opinion it is necessary to ensure the independence of Hungary as part of the solution of the Italian question. This message starts as follows:

The war between Austria on the one hand, Piemont and France on the other, is almost certain. This war will not remain restricted to Italy. It is very likely that in the course of the present year I shall be in the condition to present my country with a fair and a promising chance for reconquering its freedom and independence.

Kossuth insisted on Steinthal's commission probably because the Szeklers played a primary role in his plan:

I attach very great importance to the point that the gallant Szeklers should know that they will be called upon to take the leading part in that quarter of the country and that means shall be taken to bring a proper quantity of arms within their reach — but that they are expected to act (when they shall be called upon) with such precision and dispatch as will answer their hereditary renown and that facility of organization, which on account of their former institutions they still possess.

This then is the content of the *Pro Memoria*. The sudden and unexpected agreement brought about by the apparently unmotivated compromise of Napoleon III, in *Villafranca* on July 11, thwarted all the detailed plans and unrealized dreams of what would have been the greatest coup staged by emigrés.

However, neither Kossuth nor Steinthal was aware of the fact that the mission was being watched closely by the Austrian police from Steinthal's arrival in Hungary. This point was brought to light by Jenő Koltay-Kastner: he found Haller's report on "the probable spy Steinthal".<sup>24</sup>

According to this report, the Austrian police had already been informed of Steinthal's mission on April 13, — i.e., one day before he was recommended to Kossuth by Csernátony! The Unitarian agent arrived in Pozsony (now Bratislava) on May 8, and from that time on, all his movements and doings were being watched and diligently reported on. We learn of his particularly long stay with Count Csáky and with the family of the emigré Ernő Simonyi in Pozsony, and his visits to Ferenc Toldy, the then secretary-general of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and among others to Sámuel Brassai, the eminent Unitarian intellectual of the age — during his stay in Pest.

We should not overlook the ecclesiastical mission of Steinthal: besides his secret political purposes, he was also commissioned to investigate the financial and social situation of the the Unitarians in Transylvania. Steinthal was asked to pave the way for the setting up of English scholarships for talented Unitarian students.

This facet of the commission can be followed by Steinthal's own account, written for the *Christian Reformer*.<sup>25</sup> The first point to note is that in his official report there is no mention of his political mission, though his view of Austria is already revealed early on in his report:

The Austrian Government by insidious means was trying to undermine the freedom of schools and colleges, so long the pride of Transylvanian Unitarianism. . .

Though there is no mention of his stay in Pozsony, he remarks:

I was detained by various circumstances.

Though Steinthal had not been aware that his activity was being watched by the police, he was nevertheless informed about their inquiry:

A fortnight previous to my reaching the place, the head of the police had called upon one of the leading Unitarians to inquire whether I had not yet arrived, so well instructed were the guardians of public security of my movements.

Having seen the nature of this double mission, we can now turn to analyze Steinthal's picture of Transylvania.

Commenting on the history of Kolozsvár (now Cluj), he complains of the crowded, uncomfortable accomodation of the colleges:

“English ideas of comfort must, however, be laid aside on judging of these things.”

The 20th century reader cannot help but smile at the naivety of the vivid account of the encounter of this representative of a well-developed capitalist empire with a backward but extremely hospitable country. Let us see how he describes a journey to a Transylvanian village:

The white-washed cottages that looked so fair from the other side of the valley, proved to be miserable trallack hovels, with high roofs, through holes in which the smoke escaped as there were no chimneys. The yards round the cottages were filthy in the extreme, the road along which we drove was muddy in the extreme, the air was pestilential in the extreme, the fuel which is used is what the Tartars employ in Asiatic deserts, which may perhaps give warmth, but require a destruction of the nerves of smell before its heat can be enjoyed (p. 483)

And when he arrives as an unexpected guest at the house of a Hungarian Steinthal comments:

Our horses were unharnessed and our luggage in the house before I had time to say a word of apology for our unlooked for intrusion, and when at last I tried to speak I found that we were regarded as conferring a favour upon our host than receiving one from him. I may say that this hospitality is characteristic of the Hungarians . . . (p. 484)

In the company of Professor Nagy, of the Kolozsvár Unitarian College, Steinthal made a round-trip of the region, visiting the famous Szekler towns and villages. He was keen on studying the ethnic and religious diversity of the region, and noted the spirit of intolerance provoked by the Catholic Habsburgs. This he attributed to political oppression:

Many longing wishes were uttered that a day might come for Hungary when freedom of speech would be enjoyed again, and the pure form of Christianity upheld by Unitarians might be preached amongst the people. (p. 488)

From a literary point of view Steinthal's encounter with the most radical sect of the "radical reformation", namely the *Sabbatarians*, is worth mentioning. He outlines a brief history of this "judaizing sect" and then describes the discovery of the manuscripts of old Hungarian Sabbatarian songs:

It happened that in the University Library at Pesth an old MS hymn-book was found. The gentleman who discovered it, being much struck by the strange doctrines contained in hymns, laid a selection of them before the Hungarian Academy. On hearing the hymns read, the gentleman immediately declared that these must be hymns of the Sabbatarians . . . (p. 537)

Here Steinthal adds that he had his friend, Mr. L. Csernátony translate some of these hymns into English.

At the end of his account, Steinthal gives voice to his sympathy with the oppressed races and religions in Transylvania, emphasizing the necessity for the emancipation and liberation of these people.

If I have returned with deeper feelings of attachment to the secured freedom of England, it has also been with deepened sympathies for a noble race that has shewn itself worthy of equal freedom to our own, and whose past history gives good ground for hope that that freedom cannot with impunity be withheld. (p. 538)

The double mission of Alfred Steinthal is an illustration of the intertwining of 19th century Unitarianism with the struggle for independence and political liberation. The Anglo-Hungarian Unitarian relations paved the way to Kossuth's success in England and Kossuth's agitation in England strengthened the relations between the two churches. Steinthal's activity constituted a link between liberal Unitarianism and the politics of the emigrés in 1859.

Twenty-three years later Steinthal wrote a letter to the "dear Governor" that is a document of emotionally and personally committed feelings:

I have always thought of it as one of the greatest pleasures I ever enjoyed, that I could claim the honour of your acquaintance, that you were good enough to prove your confidence in me by entrusting me with some knowledge of your plans and objects.<sup>26</sup>

#### John James Tayler's "Narrative of a Visit" and Private Letter from Transylvania in 1868

John James *Tayler* (1796—1869), Professor at Manchester New College, London, was appointed the official representative of the BFUA in the celebrations to mark the 300th anniversary of the proclamation of religious freedom at Torda. He wrote a long and detailed account of his experiences in Transylvania for the *Theological Review*.<sup>27</sup> His collected correspondence was edited soon after his death, and among these letters I found one

written from the castle of his former school-friend, now the patron of the Transylvanian Unitarians, John Paget Esq., to their former Professor in York, the Rev. John Kenrick.<sup>28</sup>

Therefore our sources for investigating the mood of the Transylvanian public opinion just after the Compromise of 1867 are an official report and a private letter. Though their contents is the same, nevertheless the latter reveals more of his personal experience.

Tayler's account first describes the different ethnic groups of Transylvania. He finds the Szeklers an "intelligent and energetic race", while the Hungarian language "to the ear is rich and sonorous". János Kriza, the then Bishop of the Unitarians is the subject of a special reverence. His book, *Vadrózsák* (Wild Roses) was presented to Manchester New College. The description of his personality is fascinating:

a man of most engaging manners and appearance with something of an oriental expression in his dark features . . . full of enthusiasm for his own favourite pursuits, which are linguistic and antiquarian — relating more particularly to the popular poetry and legends of the Magyar race . . .

Like several other travellers Tayler also draws a parallel between the English and Hungarian state and society. The most obvious historical similarities present themselves in a comparison of the *Magna Charta* (1215) and the Hungarian *Golden Bull* (1222). In behaviour everything is seen in terms of British standards:

In the manners of the Hungarians there is a certain air of reserved and latent hauteur which is thoroughly English, and the unmistakable indication of self-reliance and determination.

Tayler arrived in Transylvania after the Compromise when public opinion could either give a negative or a positive response to the existence of the new-born Monarchy. After 18 years Hungary and Transylvania now re-united. In Hungary the anti-Habsburg feelings, the idea of nationalism still survived and dominated but at the same time most people accepted the new stateform. Paget's wife for example,

out of pure patriotism never allowed a German word to escape her lips

On the other hand:

the predominant tone of political sentiment was strong Constitutionalism . . . something corresponding to the more liberal and advanced type of English Whiggism, with a revived and ardent loyalty since the recent change in Austrian policy, to the reason of the sovereign as King of Hungary, not as Emperor of Austria, with whom as such they profess to have no political relation.

We read about Paget who was an enthusiastic supporter of the 1848—49 revolution and War of Independence and was forced to emigrate to England in the early years of Habsburg-absolutism and there he propagated the cause of Kossuth. He was able to return to Transylvania only with the protection of the British authorities, but now:

he has no love of Kossuth and his adherence, who, he thinks, misunderstand the true interest of their country.

In his official report Tayler writes as follows:

He (i.e. Paget) emphatically belongs to the Constitutional, as opposed to the extreme democratic party. Deák is with him the fitting representative and expression of the Hungarian policy.

One striking point is that he neither uses the German word "*Ausgleich*" nor the English "*Compromise*" to refer to the change in political life between Austria and Hungary. But he does not hesitate to express his displeasure when he sees school-children singing songs against Kossuth:

They sang part of a song, which, I regretted to learn was tinged with strong political feeling and directed against Kossuth. I see no sense of filling the minds of the children with political pre-possessions. . . . Should reaction ever come it may only intensify its violence . . .

Discussing the teachings of Unitarianism with the keen mind of a theologian he wrote of Ferenc Dávid widely held to have been the founder of Transylvanian Unitarianism, independent from Blandrata:

Blandrata was in every sense a bad man whom no one would like to regard as the founder of any Unitarian church.

Like Steinthal he found it also strange that though the Unitarian ministers adhere to the *Summa Theologiae*, of the 18th century theologian Szentábrahámi, they still maintain their own, independent views.

When visiting the library he remarks:

"It needs an ampler supply of modern critical works."

During the celebrations the main speech was delivered by the Professor and the future Bishop of the Unitarian Church, József Ferencz (1835–1928). This speech interested Tayler greatly and the 20th century reader can also find it an important document of what Unitarianism stands for in the words of a leading Unitarian:

Far be it to me . . . to limit freedom of faith to Unitarianism exclusively. I only wish to shew by the example of Unitarianism that religious liberty is really in a better condition than it was . . . Indeed it is high-time that the last spark of intolerance should be put out, that men should be united to teach each other by the Christian feeling of brotherly love; it is high-time that we no longer despised or persecuted each other . . . We should no longer force our faith and opinions on others, but allow everyone to form his own teaching with that freedom wherewith Christ hath made us free, and that we should no longer venture to reduce anyone under the yoke of bondage . . . Give free development to the human mind and await the result without fear.

And later:

If we adhere obstinately to the articles of faith laid down by our forefathers centuries ago, regarding them as the *non plus ultra* of perfection . . . from which we must shut out the freshening air of science and free inquiry, then no doubt like every other religion which thinks itself complete and finished, Unitarianism will have to take its place among a collection of antiquities . . . But if we regard Unitarianism as a strong and vigorous organism, full of life and capable of development, ever ready to admit new truths and constantly regenerating itself by their influence . . . then I am bold to say, the future of Unitarianism is secured for ever . . .

While Steinthal finished his account with an expression of sympathy for an oppressed people, Tayler produced a document about Hungary in the immediate post-Compromise period, a country full of hope for the future:

Every Englishmen interested in the future of Hungary must feel how important it is that the public opinion of that great and promising country should be liberal and enlightened, earnest and religious. Least of all England can allow the extinction of such a member from the brotherhood of free peoples . . . May she (i.e. Hungary) become the base of a grand *cordon sanitaire* of free institutions . . . to protect Western Europe from the infection of despotic principles which lie beyond it!"



Alexander Gordon's "Report . . ." and Andrew Chalmers'  
"Transylvanian Recollections" in 1879

In August, 1879, two English guests arrived in Transylvania to participate in the commemoration of the 300th anniversary of Ferenc Dávid's death. Alexander Gordon and Andrew Chalmers were the official British Unitarian representatives at the celebrations, of which detailed accounts were given in the *Keresztény Magvető* (Christian Seed-sower) in 1879. For us it is not their comings and goings which are of primary importance but the fact that they visit marks a tradition begun by Steinthal and Tayler: in other words, they develop further the "account" as a genre.

In their "Transylvanian recollections" these church-diplomats, visiting Hungary one hundred years ago, witnessed and recorded that *radical change* in social and political life that took place in a period of twenty years in the second half of the 19th century,

Gordon's *Report . . .*<sup>29</sup> is of shorter length, and perhaps its most interesting feature is the noting of the replacement of Latin as language of religion and education by West European languages: in the case of the Unitarians by English. In Kolozsvár the *English Conversation Club* had been in existence for three years under the sponsorship of John Paget. Gordon writes as follows:

In reading the narrative of Mr. Tayler's journey to Transylvania . . . and comparing it with my own experiences, I derived the impression that Mr. Tayler's visit occurred just at the close of old state of things which has passed or rapidly is passing away. Partly owing to the introduction of English thought and culture, which has been steadily going on since 1860, partly owing to the new development of nationality, our church in Transylvania is losing some of its antique cast and provincial features. It is not without significance that the forms of ecclesiastical procedure have been de-Latinized. Latin, which was the medium of all school-instruction till 1848, and which must, like every dead language have been to a certain extent a constraint upon the free expansion of ideas, is now completely disused. By the younger men it is forgotten, while a native literature has sprung up . . . embracing every department of thought and science . . . The intense nationality of the people, which in Mr. Tayler's time was symbolized by the universal use of picturesque garb, is not less real or strong today: but provincialism has been exchanged for patriotism. (p. 39-40)

Chalmers' *Transylvanian Recollections* (1880), a book of 112 pages, can be found in the Kossuth-collection of the *Országos Széchényi Könyvtár* (National Library). On the first page is written the personal recommendation of the author: "To the Governor of Hungary L. Kossuth with J. Kovács, highest respects and kind regards of the Author . . . 1881."<sup>30</sup>

The first chapter bears the title "Early Hungarian History" and depicts the origin of the Szeklers. We learn here that the author's first memories of Hungary go as far back as the autumn of 1849, when he, as little child watched with curiosity as Scotchmen drank a toast to "Hungarian Liberty".

Ferenc Dávid's church is introduced in its historical context:

While Hungary was thus handed over to a protracted contest between the spirit of liberty and of arbitrary power, Transylvania became a theatre of struggle which is unique in modern ecclesiastical history. In that remote land embosomed within the Carpathians and the Transylvanian Alps, the work of the Reformation narrowly escaped being carried out to its logical completion.

Chalmers agrees with the contemporary opinion that the Unitarian church was founded by Dávid and not by Blandrata.

The connecting links between people of different nations and languages are the common ideals which break through language barriers:

Though divided by distance, nationality and language we had the same great mission, and the same sacred aims, Christianity in its primitive purity had broken down the barriers of race and speech, and it was powerful still to promote fraternity, peace and good will on earth . . .

In the big hall of the grammar school of *Székelykeresztur* (now Cristurul-Secuiesc) Chalmers delivered a lecture with the title: *National Progress and Its Higher Aspects*.<sup>31</sup> This speech can be considered important as it reviews current political and social problems. He hopes that not only the heroes of the past will be celebrated but also contemporary issues will be faced boldly.

Francois David's Commemoration ought to rouse not merely feelings of gratitude to the heroes and the martyrs of their faith, but a sense of responsibility . . . for fresh effort and self-denial. (p. 49)

The concept of *progress* runs through the whole lecture. He argues that evolution has arrived at a state of freedom when the realization of ideas of higher value can be carried out:

The Liberties of Hungary and of its Unitarian Church were fortunately now secure, and the time had come when the higher qualities of the Hungarian race could have free play and power. (p. 49)

In Chalmers' book we find interesting descriptions of the different ethnic groups inhabiting Transylvania: the Szeklers, the Wallachs, the Saxons, the Jews and the Gipsies. Separate chapters are devoted to the first two peoples.

Chalmers was accompanied on part of his round-trip by Baron Balázs Orbán (1830—1890), the author of the redoubtable *Székelyföld leírása* (The description of Szeklerland; 1868—1873). We may suppose therefore that much of his information was received from the Baron.

In the Szekler-land is to be found the finest peasantry on earth. I was surprized to see so many tall, handsome men, with such intelligent and manly faces and so many women with kind and pleasant expression.

When visiting the towns he remarks that "the Szeklers have never shown much building enterprise", town-building was rather in the hands of the Saxons, "the industrious colonists", who came from the area of the Lower Rhine and settled in Transylvania in the 12th century. The building of defences against foreign invaders is a characteristic feature of their town-architecture. He describes the process by which Kolozsvár changed from a German into a Hungarian town in the second half of the 16th century. It was the espousal of Unitarianism that drove out the Germans who were all Lutherans. Chalmers writes that they escaped "as from a plague-stricken city". Strangely enough, the same image appears in Charles Boner's book: "They fled before it as they would from pestilence" (1865).<sup>32</sup>

Writing about the Wallachs, he notes their "woe-begone" appearance. But on one occasion he has a friendly conversation with an orthodox clergyman.

Then we clinked glasses and rejoiced to feel the gulf between Eastern orthodoxy and Western heresy bridged over by the idea of common citizenship in the world.

Chalmers points out the interwoven relationship between political and and social Liberalism and Transylvanian Unitarianism.

The Protestants may fairly claim to have fostered the liberty-loving spirit, which has helped to preserve the political existence of the country and secured its present status in Europe. This spirit has been the very essence of the vital principle of the Unitarian Church above all others, and within its pale religious liberty and national and intellectual rights have been alike held sacred and defended with fidelity and courage. (p. 83)

The chapter entitled *A Political Propaganda* deserves special interest. This contains a summary of a lecture he delivered at the *English Conversation Club* of Kolozsvár on 6 September 1879, with the title: "*The Policy of Gladstone and Beaconsfield in Reference to the Eastern Question*". The Government of the Tory Disraeli (Lord Beaconsfield) from 1874—1880 was preceded and followed by Gladstone's Liberal Governments (1868—1874 and 1880—1885). Changes of governments of course, produce changes in foreign policy as well. The whole of Europe looked towards the Balkans where the *Russian-Turkish war* being fought out. Begun in 1877, the war would lead to the emancipation of Bulgaria from Turkish rule. The Disraeli-Government sided with Turkey partly because of the support of the Turks they hoped to get hold of Cyprus and Afghanistan; Gladstone, bringing the atrocities of Turkey in Bulgaria to public attention, won British support for the Christian peoples of East and South-East Europe in their struggle against the "Turkish infidel".

The Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, however sided with Turkey out of fear of a "panslavic overflow" in Europe: students paraded their support of Turkey in Budapest. The Hungarian Parliament demanded the prevention of the dismemberment of the Turkish Empire, though the Tisza-Government declared its neutrality towards Russia.

Anxious to extend or preserve their spheres of influence, the Monarchy and Russia clashed diplomatically. The former was afraid of the idea of panslavism, the latter, though for her own ulterior motives, fought for the emancipation of the Balkan peoples. As the *Congress of Berlin* of 1878 thwarted the ambitions of Russia, there still remained obstacles to the emancipation of these peoples. The Monarchy, fearing of a Russian attack, signed an agreement with Germany, so bringing about the *Double Alliance* of Germany and the Monarchy, while the Balkan remained the "powder-barrel" of Europe that would blow up thirty-five years later . . .

It was in this political climate that Chalmers tried to influence Hungarian public opinion in the spirit of Gladstone: i.e. in support of the emancipation of the Balkan peoples. However, although aware that this question was a "delicate ground" in Hungary, he still voices his sincere criticism of Hungarian policy, claiming to have the right to do this as a supporter of Hungarian freedom and independence.

And now let us see his impressions of the country, which reflect twenty years of change since Steinthal's visit in 1859.

Thirty years have passed since Hungary gave a most convincing proof of her baptism into the modern spirit. Her supreme efforts to shake off the dynastic bonds and petrified institutions of the past was nobly sustained . . . For seventeen calamitous years, she sat in silent mourning, under the deadening absolutism of Austria, and then rising from the dust began to build up the fabric of a new and fairer commonwealth. You have still nobles, citizens and peasants, but they are no longer divided by a Chinese wall. You have also re-asserted your historical right of self-government and opened a worthy career to the talents and the patriotism of your countrymen. Your picturesque capital has become a great literary centre, and the light of knowledge is at last penetrating to your most secluded hamlets. Your army is well-organized and equipped and ready alike for defence or defiance. Your assured independence, improved commercial relations, increasing skill in agriculture, and means of communication will bring about better days than even your golden age of Corvinus. Your country has thus the prospect of a happy and brilliant future, and location makes her the natural meeting place between Eastern and Western civilization. (p. 84)

And now Chalmers asks how Hungary will benefit from her freedom, whether she is going to join the liberal countries of Western Europe by showing tolerance or whether she aims at military glory and great power status by oppressing smaller peoples. Hungarian sympathy for Turks was a great surprise, he admits, for British public opinion. He remembers the 150-year long Turkish oppression and finds both Hungary's dislike of Russia and her affection for Turkey "needlessly intense".

As Hungary is simply a collection of ethnic mosaics, so for the sake of economic development a "generous sympathy for the weaker races within your border" is of vital importance. To solve the ethnic problem, it is necessary to build a "united society" by assimilation, based on the ideas of freedom and equality.

Hungary is called upon to grasp the spiritual leadership of the country, thus providing "a centre of cohesion round which races will gather, to assist in fabricating the texture of a united society . . ." According to Chalmers, the Hungarian Constitution can be adapted as the basis for a federative union and British liberals would be happy:

to find the Magyar nationality enlisted by divine Providence in so sublime a mission as paving the way for a happy union of long divided peoples on one of the fields of ancient civilization and military renown. (p. 90-1)

This lecture on the Eastern question was followed by a fierce debate, which Chalmers summed up as follows:

I learned that though their attitude (i.e. Hungary's) towards the Balkan population may appear unsympathetic and ungenerous, it by no means deserves unqualified condemnation. The whole situation is so exceedingly complicated by ethnological and historical considerations, that foreign critics rarely make due allowance for the various tendencies which shape the present policy of Hungary. (p. 92)

Then he tries to find reason for fervently held Hungarian patriotism by referring to mysticism of Hungarian history, which is, in many respects similar to the history of the Jews. The motif of the "compact sealed with the blood" of the seven chiefs is similar to the covenant on Mount Sinai, which formed in both cases a nation out of nomadic peoples. The crown of St. Stephen is compared to the ark of the Covenant, while the Wallachs and Slavs seem aliens from the Commonwealth of the children of Ammon.

The book ends with the following thought:

At last she (i.e. Hungary) rejoices in her long lost liberty and her fate is in her own hand. And it will be well if she recognizes that her most urgent needs are higher intellectual and moral life for millions of her people, and along with this, the deliverance from superstition, and the effacement of race prejudices . . . Let her secure the consolidarity of her people by burying past jealousies and strife, by enlightened internal reforms, by generous concessions, and by fostering an unselfish patriotic enthusiasm. This alone can merge her population in a strong and mixed nationality and ward off internal dissensions and be her best bulwark against the aggressive policy still pursued in the lands beyond her eastern border. (p. 112)

#### Similar Accounts — Different Images

Andrew Chalmers' "photographs", taken 100 years ago in Transylvania do not possess merely curiosity-value. They are of course quite fascinating, these dusty, quaint portraits of Szeklers, Wallachs and Saxons and the panorama of Kolozsvár in 1879.

The social historian and the historian of ideas will find here an exciting evidence of the radical changes in the social life and intellectual climate that was taking place between 1859 and 1879.

Steinthal arrived in a country oppressed by Habsburg-absolutism, its people deprived of their civil rights. Tayler noted the post-Compromise atmosphere of hopeful confidence, while Chalmers visited Transylvania at the height of the economic and political activity of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. For him there are no signs at all of any "leap backwards".

All three men came to Transylvania as representatives of British Unitarianism. Their accounts clearly show that *Unitarianism as the religious expression of the idea of Liberalism* functioned as a *catalyst* in the spread of the English language and culture in the evolution of the model of Western capitalist society in East-Central Europe in the 19th century.

Tibor F. Fabiny

#### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> See e.g. Hankiss, J., *Nemzetkép és irodalomkutatás* (The Picture of a Nation and Literary research) Budapest, 1932.
- <sup>2</sup> See esp. Gál, I., *Magyarország, Anglia és Amerika* (Hungary, England and America) Budapest, 1945.
- <sup>3</sup> The lectures delivered at the conference will be published in a volume with the same title.
- <sup>4</sup> Pirnát, A., *Die Ideologie der Siebenbürger Antitrinitarier in den 1570er Jahren*, Budapest, 1961; Dán, R., *Humanizmus, reformáció, antitrinitarizmus és a héber nyelv Magyarországon* (Humanism, Reformation, Antitrinitarianism and the Hebrew Language in Hungary) Budapest, 1973.
- <sup>5</sup> Kovács, L., *The Unitarian Church in Rumania its History and Message for Today. Transactions of the Unitarian Historical Society* Oct. 1968.
- <sup>6</sup> Szent-Iványi, S., *Az unitarizmus lényege* (The Essence of Unitarianism) Kolozsvár (Cluj) 1932. p. 30
- <sup>7</sup> *ibid.* p. 41
- <sup>8</sup> Wilbur, E. M., *A History of Unitarianism in Transylvania, England and America* Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1952 pp. 185–208
- <sup>9</sup> *ibid.* pp. 164–184
- <sup>10</sup> Gál, I., *England and Transylvania Hungarian Quarterly* 1939. pp. 243–55
- <sup>11</sup> Varannai, A., *John Bowring and Hungarian Literature, Acta Litteraria* 1963, No. 1–2 and 3–4
- <sup>12</sup> The subject of a longer study of mine is entitled: *Relations between the Transylvanian and English Unitarians* (Manuscript).
- <sup>13</sup> See esp. Gál, I., *Magyarország . . .*; Kovács, J., *An Oration in Memory of the Late John Paget Esq. Honorary Member of the "Kolozsvár English Conversation Club"*, Kolozsvár 1893. Balogh, J., *John Paget, Hungarian Quarterly* 1939. II. pp. 110–32; Honti, J., *John Paget angol orvos kapcsolata Magyarországgal* (John Paget, the English Physician and his Connection with Hungary) *Orvosi Hetilap* 1969. pp. 1633–4
- <sup>14</sup> Paget, J., *Recollections of Mr. Tagart's Visit to Transylvania. Christian Reformer* 1858. pp. 746–59
- <sup>15</sup> Szabad, Gy., *Kossuth and the British "Balance of Power" Policy (1859–1861)* (Stud. Hist. Ac. Scient. Hung.) Budapest, 1960. p. 9
- <sup>16</sup> Kossuth, L., *Irataim az emigrációból* (My Papers from the Emigration) Vol. I. p. 233
- <sup>17</sup> OL R 90 I. 2750 Kossuth: *Utasítás annak, aki Magyarhonba menend* (Instructions for the Person Travelling to Hungary) 10 May, 1859.
- <sup>18</sup> OL R 90 I. 2729 Kossuth: *Pro Memoria*. (Special thanks are due to Dr. Tibor Frank who called my attention to letters concerning Kossuth's relations with the Unitarians).
- <sup>19</sup> OL R 90 I. 2728 Csernátóny to Kossuth 14 April 1859.
- <sup>20</sup> OL R 90 I. 2730 Csernátóny to Kossuth 15 April 1859.
- <sup>21</sup> Koltay-Kastner, J., *A Kossuth-emigráció Olaszországban* (The Kossuth-Emigration in Italy) Budapest, 1960.
- <sup>22</sup> OL R 90 I. 2674 Steinthal to Kossuth 14 January 1859.
- <sup>23</sup> OL R 90 I. 2207 and Kossuth *op. cit.* p. 139

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- <sup>23</sup> OL R 90 I. 2207 and Kossuth *op. cit.* p. 139

<sup>24</sup> Koltay-Kastner, J., *op. cit.* p. 241 and J. K. K.: *Írások a Kossuth-emigráció történetéhez 1859* (Papers Concerning the Kossuth-Emigration) Szeged, 1949. pp. 237–8

<sup>25</sup> Rev. S. A. Steinthal's account of a Visit to Transylvania, *Christian Reformer* 1859, pp. 477–89 and 530–8; On Steinthal: Borbély, I., Simén Domokos és kora (The Age of Domokos Simén) *Keresztény Magvető* 1926. pp. 210–27

<sup>26</sup> OL R 90 I. 6155 Steinthal to Kossuth 21 June 1881.

<sup>27</sup> Tayler, J. J., Narrative of a Visit to the Unitarian Churches of Transylvania on the Occasion of the Three-Hundredth Anniversary of the First Proclamation of Religious Freedom at Torda in 1568. *The Theological Review*, No. XXIV. January, 1869 pp. 1–48; On Tayler: Frank, T., *The British Image of Hungary 1865–1870*, Budapest 1976, pp. 159–60. 180., 228.

<sup>28</sup> To The Rev. John Kenrick 3rd Sept. 1868. In: John Hamilton Thorn (ed.) *Letters, Embracing His Life, of John James Tayler* London, 1872 Vol. II. PP. 304–10

<sup>29</sup> Alexander Gordon., *Report of an Official Visit to Transylvania on the Occasion of the Tercentennial Commemoration of Francis David*, London, 1879.

<sup>30</sup> Chalmers, A., *Transylvanian Recollections*. Sketches of Hungarian Travel and History. London—Manchester—Klausenburg, 1880. On Chalmers: Kovács, J., Chalmers Erdélyről (Chalmers on Transylvania) *Keresztény Magvető*. Vol. XVI. 1881 pp. 41–6

<sup>31</sup> See *Keresztény Magvető* 1879 and Chalmers: *op. cit.* p. 44.

<sup>32</sup> Boner, Ch., *Transylvania: its Products and People* London, 1865 p. 106.

## ABBREVIATIONS

OL = Országos Levéltár (National Archives)  
BUFA = British Unitarian and Foreign Association

## The Legend of Ferenc Rényi, a Hungarian Hero of Freedom, in English, Finnish, Irish, and Polish Literature

In Hungary, Kaarle Leopold Krohn's (Väinö by pen-name) romantic poem, *Ferencz Rényi* has become relatively familiar in Géza Képes' translation.<sup>1</sup> The ballad is about one of the heroes in the War of Independence of 1848–49, Ferencz Rényi, captured by the Austrians, who want him to give away the insurgents' main place of refuge. But Rényi refuses to speak. Then General Haynau has Rényi's mother brought from the nearby village. He is confronted with her and Haynau says he will have her shot unless he gives the required information. She herself pleads to her son not to speak, nor to betray his country. Rényi does not speak and his mother falls flat out dead. Now Haynau sends for his young sister, but she also encourages him to keep silent and goes into death proudly. But Rényi has to stand another trial; his young wife is also sent for, who pleads him amidst tears to speak and save both of their lives. Rényi's face glows with shame, he pushes her aside and gives no answer. Before being shot dead, the wife curses her husband, who goes mad under the weight of tribulations:

Wordless stands the madman  
With lips motionless,  
Wordless are the soldiers,  
And Haynau too.