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THE HUNGARIAN PURITANS¹

IN spite of the geographical and linguistic disadvantages which have always handicapped the Hungarians in their international contacts, the Hungarian Reformed Church has never been isolated from the Evangelical Christendom of Western Europe. Practically all significant movements which stirred the life of Western Protestantism from the time of the Reformation to the present day have found response in Hungary. The crypto-Calvinist theology, the aggressive type of Lutheranism represented by the *Formula Concordiae*, Puritanism, Presbyterianism, Independency, Coccejanism, Cartesianism, Pietism, Rationalism, etc., exerted, in turn, their influence in this country. These Western influences reached Hungary not only through literary channels, but were also mediated—especially from the time when the national languages began to displace the universal medium of academic intercourse, the Latin—by Hungarian students who went abroad to complete their studies. The *Wanderjahr* of the divinity student has well nigh become an institution in our Church as the training of those who are to serve as *liaison officers* between her and the Evangelical Christendom of the West. In the century of the Reformation these students went, as a rule, to Wittenberg for their post-graduate training, but, when the controversy about the *Formula Concordiae* began, those of them who refused to accept the theology embodied in that document were compelled to leave the University. From this time on most of them went to the German Reformed University of Heidelberg which, however, fell victim to the ravages of General Tilly in 1622, and the Hungarian students had to move further west. A migration began to the Dutch Reformed Universities, and a few of the students crossed the channel and went to the great English seats of learning. This expansion of their travels greatly widened their intellectual and spiritual horizon. They came into personal contact in England as well as in Holland, where many English Puritan emigrants lived at this time, with the movement of English Puritanism which, through their mediation reached Hungary and attained to a great

¹ Note: The author wishes to acknowledge his special indebtedness for the material of this article to Dr. Jenő Zoványi's work, *Puritánus mozgalmak a magyar református egyházban*, Budapest, 1911.

significance in the history of our Church. The Hungarian Reformed Church at this time, at least in Transylvania proper and in the North-Eastern part of the country which belonged to the Principality of Transylvania, enjoyed a short spell of comparative peace and the atmosphere was conducive to the discussion of spiritual problems and to facing the challenge of those new ideas which were zealously championed by a group of young ministers who were indebted for their inspiration either directly or indirectly to English Puritanism.

They found that the conditions in their Church were short of their ideals and in need of reform.

I

In the first place, the government of the Church at this time bore little resemblance to the New Testament model. It was neither Calvinistic, nor Lutheran, nor Roman Catholic, but a mixture of the three, because its previous development had followed, in the adverse political and religious circumstances, the line of expediency rather than that of clear-cut principles. The overwhelming victory of the Turk at Mohács, in 1526, was followed by a period of political and ecclesiastical disintegration. This was the time when the work of the Reformation, which was of the Lutheran type first, was undertaken on a larger scale. The State, while too weak to offer any forcible resistance, was opposed to Protestantism, and made no effort to establish a Protestant State Church. The landed lords and city magistrates, however, most of them favourably disposed towards Protestantism, took advantage of the general chaos to enlarge their power both in the political and ecclesiastical sphere, and while in most places they gave their support to the cause of the Reformation, they exercised, as patrons, certain prerogatives in the external administration of the newly organized churches. The actual management of the churches was left to the clergy. The organization of the clergy was, at this time, a revival, or rather a survival of the old Roman Catholic organization. Sometimes whole dioceses¹ went over to the new faith, and in these cases, the heads of the dioceses, the Seniors or Prelates, were simply continued in their lifelong offices. The development of the Superintendent's or Bishop's office was somewhat different.

¹ Contemporary designation of a smaller synod corresponding to the present presbytery or classis.

Roman Catholic Bishops never became Protestant Bishops, and in the Western and North-Western parts of the country, where the Bishops' authority was protected by the Hapsburg kings, the Protestants technically remained under the jurisdiction of the Roman Catholic Bishops until 1608. In those parts of the country, however, which were under Turkish or Transylvanian rule, the old ecclesiastical organization had collapsed, and since in Hungary the institutions of the Roman Catholic Church had been so closely tied up with the functions of the State as perhaps nowhere else in Europe, the disintegration of the old ecclesiastical system created a problem of the first magnitude. Efforts were made, therefore, by the Protestants to replace the former organization, in the first instance, by appointing Superintendents or Bishops. The Turks did not interfere, as the political power of the Protestant Bishops was nothing compared with that of their Roman predecessors, and in Transylvania, the Protestant Princes of the seventeenth century did their best to augment the authority of the Protestant Bishops.

It is obvious from the foregoing survey that the laity—excepting, of course, the patrons—had no place in the government of the Church. The laity were not represented at the synods at all, and the order of ruling elders was absent from the churches. There was only one Presbyterian feature in the constitution of the Church at this time which found expression in a curious custom, viz. the parishioners had the right to declare at the end of each year whether they wanted to continue their minister in his charge or not.

The arrival of the Swiss type of Reformation did not alter the form of church government. The leaders of the Reformed Church, although they were by no means ignorant of the great Calvinistic principles of polity, did not think it wise, in view of the unfavourable political and social circumstances and of the imminent danger of re-Catholicization, to enter upon any radical experiment of changing the constitution of the Church. Thus the sixteenth century type of church government, practically in all its essentials, was handed down to the seventeenth century. At the start of the Puritan movement, although a few years prior to this and independent of the Puritan movement, experiments had been made in the Western part of the country to introduce the Palatinate type of consistory, the Hungarian Reformed Church was, on the whole, *not* Presbyterian.

The lack of the consistories was intensely felt by the Hungarian Puritans. Yet while the impact of the Puritan movement was directed towards the changing of the church government, we must also consider the equally important Puritan efforts to give inlet to the fresh waters of practical piety into the swampy pools of church life; to purge the Church from certain survivals of Roman Catholic practice; to restore the freedom and spontaneity of public worship; and to raise the level of education both in the lower and in the higher schools.

The Hungarian Puritan movement is associated with the name of John Dali Tolnai. He was the bursar of the Nagyvárad Church, studied about seven years in Holland and England. At the University of Franeker he became an ardent pupil of William Ames, the famous Puritan scholar. He crossed the channel in 1633. This was the year when William Laud was made Archbishop of Canterbury and the following years showed to the young Hungarian scholar Episcopalianism at its worst. It is little wonder that he conceived a deep-seated aversion to Episcopacy, and was deeply impressed by the piety and perseverance of the Puritans.¹ Tolnai was not the only Hungarian student in England at this time who came under the influence of Puritanism. Some years later, on February 9th, 1639, ten Hungarian students met in London to enter into a covenant.

II

The full text of this covenant, which was called *Formula singularitatis*, is as follows:

"We, unworthy servants of our Lord Jesus Christ, hereby make a common confession in the holy sight of Jehovah, pledging ourselves by this sworn covenant to follow God in all the days of our life and to serve Him continually, by His power, even unto the day of our death. We take this vow to the glory of God and in recognition of the great things He hath done with our sinful and loathsome souls in England. We regard it as our duty—wherever we may live and whenever the day of our death may come—that we, as true members of Christ, shall work for each other's salvation, and willingly submitting ourselves to this covenant, we give liberty one another to counsel, rebuke and build each other. If anyone of us would seek the things of this world rather than the glory of Christ and each other's salvation, that man shall be regarded as an apostate who is doomed to damnation."

¹ While in England, Tolnai made the acquaintance of Dr. John Stoughton, the friend of Samuel Hartlib, the famous educationalist. Stoughton's posthumous work, "*Felicitas ultimi saeculi*", was dedicated by Hartlib to George Rákóczy I.: "*Illustrissimo et celsissimo Principi ac Domino D. Georgio Rakoci, Principi Transylvaniae, partium regni Hungariae Domino et Siculorum Comiti, etc. Heroi pio, prudenti, forti, felici, pietatis & litterarum amatori, Protectori et Propugnatori incomparabili, posthumus hoc opusculum viri pietati, doctrina . . . celeberrimi . . . dedicat . . . Samuel Harlibius.*" The first line of the book is as follows: "*Domino Tolneio, Hungaro-Transylvano, Salutes omnes, etc.*"

“ In order that we may have the power to fulfil this covenant we shall pray unceasingly and guard each other faithfully.”

“ May the God of heaven and the Saviour of our soul, our Lord Jesus Christ, give us salvation. Amen.”

“ Whenever a good opportunity presents itself we shall be willing to renew this covenant.”

“ John Tolnai, Stephen Mohácsi, Matthias Ujházi, Michael Ungvári, Daniel Kolosi, Benedict Szikszai, John Molnár, John Kuthi, Paul Keserüi, Nicholas Kecskeméti.”

“ Lord, give us Thy help lest Satan should take us captive and by breaking this covenant we should perish forever. O Lord, Thou knowest our infirmity: strengthen us and let us not be tested beyond our power for we are earthen vessels which perish easily. In all our tribulations show us graciously the way of deliverance and help us to withstand all our temptations. For the sake of Thy holy Son, our only Lord and Mediator. Hasten to our help. Amen.”

While this pious document is too general to cast any light on the practical aims of the “ London League ”, it expresses the religious fervour of these young men who had, during their sojourn among the Puritans of England, gone through a great spiritual experience, the consciousness of “ what God hath done with their sinful and loathsome souls in England ”. This was the inexhaustible source of their inspiration.

Shortly after the members of the “ London League ” returned to their homeland rumours spread abroad about the contents of the *Formula singularitatis*, and the conservative clergy of the Transtibiscan and Cistibiscan districts, who were afraid of dangerous heresies and innovations, took preventive measures by a Finding at their synod in Debrecen that the returning bursars will not be eligible to any church offices until they pledge themselves to refrain from trying to introduce any innovations on their own authority. At the time when this resolution was passed the Puritans had already begun their preliminary work. They had made many friends chiefly among the nobility. Tolnai himself seems to have won the favour of George Rákóczy I., the powerful Prince of Transylvania and patron of the Sárospatak College, and as the President’s term was about to expire in the College, the Prince recommended Tolnai for the Presidential chair. This was a great surprise to the conservatives, but they took the challenge, and Stephen Csulyak Miskolczi, Senior of the Zemplén Diocese, called a meeting at Sárospatak for the prevention of the “ new Pharisaism ”. They resolved that in addition to the resolution of the Synod of Debrecen they would lay eight conditions before Tolnai, and only in case he submitted to these would he be appointed President of the Sárospatak College.

These conditions, however, were so humiliating that Tolnai refused to comply, and his appointment was postponed. This solution did not satisfy the Prince. He ordered Tolnai to seek reconciliation with the Church. Tolnai, who had grown tired of the vexations, submitted to the eight conditions and he was appointed President.

III

The solemnity of his installation was marred by the sharp note he struck in his inaugural address. Although his bitterness against the retrogrades was perfectly natural the unrestrained manner in which he gave vent to his resentment was by no means justified. He applied Bernard of Clairvaux' passage to his opponents: ". . . *non pastores, sed impostores, non doctores, sed seductores, non praelati, sed Pilati*". His address made a great stir and sowed the seeds of his unpopularity. His further activity in Sárospatak was characterized by the same tactlessness as was displayed in his inaugural address. One of the Puritan sins is censoriousness, and Tolnai had a full measure of this weakness. For instance, he openly classified the students into two groups: those who were "*pius*" and those who were "*impius*". His reforming zeal often overran his common sense. He failed to seek the counsel of his elder colleagues and had little regard for the traditions of his school. He turned the whole curriculum upside down. As a true pupil of his Puritan master, Ames, he was opposed to the Aristotelian scholasticism which was represented at Sárospatak by Keckermann's *Systema logicae tribus libris adornatum*. Tolnai dropped this book from the curriculum and substituted for it John Henry Bisterfeld's *Elementa logica in usum scholae Albensis*. This work, written by the influential professor of the Gyulafehérvár College, who became later on favourably disposed towards the Puritan movement, was based on Pierre de la Ramée's anti-Scholastic principles. Tolnai had no use for metaphysics, and all previous textbooks of theology were discarded to give place to Ames' *Medulla theologiae* and *De conscientia et ejus jure vel casibus*. Following these works Tolnai treated in his lectures Ethics and Dogmatics separately, which was an innovation at that time. He developed the Hungarian language at the expense of Greek and Latin. He laid great stress on the devotional exercises and made the students conform to a very high moral code. The partaking of the

Communion was made obligatory. His preaching was often offensive to many on account of his moral severity and unrestrained criticism.

Despite of all his mistakes he deserves credit for freeing the academic life from the shackles of a dry and fruitless type of Aristotelian scholasticism and for his unselfish and unabating zeal to elevate the moral and religious standard of the Sárospatak College. His valuable work, however, was not properly appreciated either by the outsiders or by his colleagues, or by the students. His antagonists felt that the time for action came when a number of students, who were opposed to Tolnai's reforms, made complaints against him and asked for an official visitation. This took place in the spring of 1642. Senior Miskolci, Chairman of the Committee of Inspectors, sent a very unfavourable report to George Rákóczy I. The prince still sympathized with Tolnai, but as the only way to restore the peace in the College, he told Tolnai to look for employment elsewhere. At this point Tolnai received a call from the Reformed Church of Miskolc, whereupon he resigned his chair and left Sárospatak after about four years of activity.

He did not stay long in Miskolc either. In 1644 George Rákóczy I rose to assist his Protestant allies against Emperor Ferdinand III, and the hostilities of the Thirty Years' War were resumed in Hungary. Sigismund Rákóczy, the son of the ruling Prince, took Tolnai with him to the camp as his war chaplain. At the end of the same year Tolnai was called, on the recommendation of his influential patron, to the first Reformed Church of Tokaj.

IV

The next year revealed that the Puritan cause had already made headway not only among the laity but also among the clergy, and as an act of humour on the part of fate, Tolnai, this opponent of hierarchy, was elected, by thirty votes against seventeen, Senior of the Abauj diocese. His case, however, did not prove the proverb: *Honores mutant mores*. He used the enlarged influence which his new office gave him to materialize his Puritan ideals. As the first step he wanted to purge the Church from the custom of "emergency baptism", which was a Roman Catholic survival. He did not admit any case of emergency with regard to baptism, and instructed his ministers not to

administer the sacrament of baptism but in the presence of the congregation. By doing this he simply enforced the injunctions of the older Hungarian canons which had lapsed through non-compliance, nevertheless he was subsequently charged with introducing innovations on his own authority. He and his followers, in an effort to restore the freedom and spontaneity of public worship, dropped the prescribed forms of worship. They had no use for commentaries and theological debates which were in great vogue in those days. On the other hand, they stressed the pastoral duties and religious education, especially the instruction of girls, which was neglected at that time. They frequently visited their parishioners and held family devotions in their homes. These things, which are taken for granted to-day, were regarded by many contemporaries as innovations. By making these smaller improvements the Puritans were just feeling their way towards greater reforms, but before they had the opportunity to undertake any of their major schemes, they were defeated by the anti-Puritans. These latter sent a list of Tolnai's "innovations" to the Seniors of the neighbouring dioceses with a view of securing their intervention for the disarming of the dangerous "innovator", and at the synod of the Abauj Diocese, on December 6th, 1645, they declared that they will no longer regard Tolnai as their Senior. In the list of "innovations" they charged him that he "boastfully declares that Hungary is in need of a reformation"; that "he is having an English book translated to be used in exercising ecclesiastical discipline"; and listed several other complaints which had reference to the rejection of "emergency baptism", the introduction of the Genevan tunes for singing the Psalms, to Tolnai's alleged favouritism in giving the preference to his partisans in filling the charges of the Diocese, etc. The neighbouring Dioceses, however, at first hesitated to interfere, but the conservatives eventually succeeded in calling together what was practically the joint-synod of the Cistibiscan and Transtibiscan districts. It took place on February 14th and 15th, 1646, in Tokaj. After Tolnai and his followers received assurance that their case would be considered in a fraternal spirit and *sine ira et studio*, they promised to acquiesce in the decision of what was a quite irregularly constituted synod of two districts. They were, however, to be disappointed, for the judgment arrived at was lacking both in fraternal spirit and in disinterestedness. The appointed attorney

charged Tolnai and his followers with creating a schism in the Hungarian Reformed Church ; with upsetting the established practice of administering the sacrament of baptism ; with imposing themselves on the people by holding family devotions “ to the great inconvenience of the homes ” ; etc. Tolnai himself was charged that he displayed self-will and disregard for his colleagues’ views in conducting his office as the Senior of the Abauj Diocese ; that he promoted his favourites and overlooked the merits of those who opposed his views ; that he introduced innovations on his own authority ; that he treated his fellow-ministers in a high-handed way and openly scolded them for the smallest faults ; that he preached the error that a man can never be certain of his salvation before his death ; that he shared the view that the holidays should be abolished ; that he declared his preliminary innovations were nothing compared with the major reforms which were to come ; and that he, while in England, daily conversed with Anabaptists, Puritans and Independents. In his defence Tolnai, while he admitted many of the charges and justified his action with regard to “ emergency baptism ” and other minor innovations by referring to the authority of older Hungarian canons and of eminent Protestant theologians, he promptly rejected the charges of partiality, despotic self-will and Arminianism, and said that he was not responsible for propagating the alleged view of the holidays. Those who attributed to him the opinion about the uncertainty of one’s salvation must have misunderstood his preaching.

After long deliberation the Synod resolved that, until a National Synod will convene for finally settling the Puritan controversy, Tolnai and his Puritan companions should be suspended from their offices.

The severity of this judgment, which was an unexpected blow to the Puritans, can be accounted for by two reasons. In the first place, the anti-Puritans were encouraged in their retributory pursuit by knowing that the supreme patron of the Hungarian Reformed Church, George Rákóczy I, himself had, in the meantime, turned against the Puritan efforts. Secondly, while the charges of which Tolnai and his companions were convicted were really side-issues which hardly justified the severity of the sentence, the conservatives were afraid of the possible developments of the Puritan movement and therefore acted on the principle of *Obsta principiis* !

Before the Synod was adjourned two ministers were commissioned to travel to Transylvania to inform the Prince orally of the proceedings. At the same time, written reports were also despatched to the Prince, and to Stephen Katona Geleji, the powerful Bishop of the Transylvanian Reformed Church. Tolnai, who was conscious of what the Prince's attitude meant in this matter, hurried to Gyulafehérvár to prevent being misrepresented by the official delegates. The prince, however, refused to see him before the delegates. To defend his case Tolnai sent a large number of letters to influential people and personally visited the Prince's wife, Susanne Lórántfy, who had always sympathized with his endeavours. He also won the Prince's two sons for his case, although the elder one, George Rákóczy, the heir to the throne, did not fully agree with him. The court chaplain, Paul Medgyesi, also took his side. This devoted and scholarly man, reputed to be the best preacher of his day in Transylvania, came into touch with English Puritanism while he studied in Cambridge. There had been a certain degree of reserve in his attitude towards the Puritan movement, but later on he fully identified himself with the Puritan reforms, particularly with the endeavours to introduce the Presbyterian form of church government. He had already won many people for this latter object, and it was owing, to a great extent, to his agitation that the Synod of the Transylvanian Reformed ministers, on June 3rd, 1646, adopted the resolution that "the institution of consistory shall be established throughout Transylvania . . . with the help of the High Magistrate". Of course, this type of Presbyterianism which left the offices of the Senior and Bishop unaffected was not the ultimate ideal for which the Hungarian Puritans strove, but they had to be satisfied in the meantime with this half-way achievement in view of the great opposition especially on the part of the Prince, who was clever enough to discover that the establishment of consistories would considerably curtail the rights which he, as the supreme patron of the Reformed Church, exercised in the affairs of the Church. Bishop Geleji, this able and energetic man, was also somewhat jealous of the consistories, and thought that the substitution of a Presbyterian constitution for the completely centralized government under which the churches were at that time, would jeopardize the hegemony of the Reformed Church in Transylvania. He and the Prince hoped that the National Synod would put an

end to the Puritan strife ; and they took steps towards calling it together.

V

The National Synod came together at Szatmárnémeti, on June 10th, 1646. After the charges against the Puritan reformers were heard Tolnai laid his Apologia before the Synod. He dwelt extensively on the question of "emergency baptism", and frankly admitted that when he fought against this erroneous practice he failed to take into account the ignorance and stubbornness of the common people. As a concession to the weak in spirit he was willing to admit that this practice could be tolerated until the people would be properly enlightened on this point. As to his "innovations", he made a distinction between introducing a new thing, *novare*, and restoring something to its original form, *renovare*. He never wished to be an *innovator*, but a *renovator*, and all he tried to do with regard to the matter of baptism was to restore the validity of the Vizsoly Canons ordaining that the sacraments shall always be administered in the presence of the congregation. He put his finger on the real issue when he said that, while some may suspect tendencies of anarchy and heterodoxy under the question of emergency baptism, a mere suspicion should never be the ground of a charge. Nevertheless they were willing to submit themselves to an investigation because they affirmed and defended the doctrine of their Church, and held that the constitution of the Hungarian Reformed Church was in conformity with the Word of God.

The Prince arrived on the following day. When he was informed of the proceedings of the previous day he expressed his wish to see reconciliation between the two parties rather than disciplinary measures. Tolnai's opponents, however, were relentless in their pursuit, and the answer given by the delegated committee to Tolnai's Apologia, which had been submitted in writing also, was anything but fair. The Synod, as far as Tolnai and his companions were concerned, confirmed the sentence of the Tokaj Synod in the hope that they would give evidence of a practical change of heart, in which case they would be restored to their former offices. The further resolutions of the National Synod defended the holidays on the ground that, although they are not divinely instituted, yet they commemorate the great acts of grace, and are, therefore, to be properly

celebrated; guarded the institution of the Synod against the Independent views; forbade the use of the name "Puritan" as a scandalous and dangerous word which suggested innovations; defended and confirmed the offices of the Senior and Superintendent; made the use of the Genevan tunes optional; declared that the schools for girls were necessary; made the practice of "emergency baptism" permissible in special circumstances and in the presence of several witnesses, or at least of the sponsors; *sincerely desired the establishment of consistories as soon as the condition of the people permitted, and His Highness the Prince and the Magistrates acceded*; and answered the need for rules and regulation which would be universally binding in the Reformed Churches to replace and complement the previous local and regional enactments. Bishop Geleji was commissioned to execute this latter resolution. Thus the National Synod approved of the presbyteries theoretically, but took no action towards introducing them.

Unlike the Synod of Tokaj, which discerned and opposed the Presbyterian tendencies of the Puritan movement, the Synod of Szatmárnémeti on the one hand severely punished Tolnai and his companions for their minor innovations, took, on the other hand, a mediating position with the underlying larger and *real* issue. This issue was the Presbyterian form of government. As we have already seen, the Synod of the Transylvanian Reformed ministers had, a week before the National Synod, resolved that "the institution of consistory shall be established throughout Transylvania . . . with the help of the High Magistrate", and it is most likely that the National Synod would have gone beyond the mere Platonic approval of the Presbyterian form of government had it not been for the forbidding presence of the supreme patron, George Rákóczy I, and the opposition of the Chairman, Bishop Geleji, which considerably chilled the Presbyterian enthusiasm of many.

Shortly after the National Synod and in accordance with his commission Bishop Geleji drafted the hundred articles which were to be the Polity of the Hungarian Reformed Churches. His chief sources were William Zepper's "*De politia ecclesiastica*", the articles of the Second Helvetic Confession, the liturgy and canons of the Dutch Reformed Churches and the older canons of the Hungarian Reformed Church. His draft failed to satisfy either side, for both of the contending parties thought that Bishop Geleji

had made, in respect of the question of consistories, undue concessions to the other party. George Rákóczy I kept on putting off his approval until he died, and his successor to the throne, George Rákóczy II, refused to sanction the articles which were too Presbyterian for his liking. After considerable modifications, chiefly in favour of the conservative view, the articles were eventually approved of by the Prince and rose to great authority throughout Hungary for nearly two hundred years.

VI

The eighty-fifth article calls the government of the Hungarian Reformed Church "aristocratico-democratic": . . . "while we justly condemn and reject that monarchy and anti-Christian Episcopacy, we shall in no wise tolerate in our churches that anarchy in which everybody is law unto himself, but we accept a somewhat aristocratic or rather aristocratico-democratic form of government. . . ."

The ninety-ninth article extensively describes the office of the ruling elders and speaks appreciatively of their work in other Christian Churches, but states that, in the opinion of the civil magistrate, the inauguration of the consistories is not, in the present conditions, within the bounds of possibility. It is suggested that the ministers may take one or two intelligent laymen into their meetings, "leaving the authority of the civil Magistrate, synods, Superintendents and Seniors untouched".

The controversy in the Hungarian Reformed Church must have been a puzzle to many theologians abroad. The Hungarian students, who studied at this time in Holland, informed their professors of the struggles at home and asked their advice about the problems which arose with the Puritan movement in Hungary. In reply to several enquiries the famous *Coccejus*¹ wrote two letters in which he cautiously admitted that where the office of the Moderator is lifelong, human weakness may easily give rise to hierarchical tendencies. *Voetius* was also consulted, and his written reply seems to have been in favour of the Puritans, only he asked them not to undertake any reforms without consulting the publicly recognized and respected men of their Church. In answer to an enquiry Samuel *Maresius*, Professor at Groningen, sent a long reply entitled *Judicium liberum et consilium theologicum ac christianum de controversiis*

¹ Cocceji Opera Omnia, volume VIII, 38th and 40th epistles.

in ecclesiis Transsylvaniae et Hungariae ab aliquo tempore agitatae praesertim circa regimen ecclesiasticum et illarum componendarum recta ratione. In this work he condemns the Roman Catholic holidays, but thinks that four holidays should be retained in the Hungarian Reformed Church: Christmas, Easter, Ascension Day, and Pentecost. He is amazed to see the great stir about such an insignificant improvement as the elimination of the "emergency baptism". He recognizes the great need of ruling elders in the Hungarian Reformed Church, but he thinks that the consistories could coexist with the present form of government, and to abolish the Senior's and Superintendents' offices would be far more perilous than to retain them. The Hungarian Puritans were dissatisfied with Maresius' views, and a former pupil of Maresius, Peter Baka Szathmári, wrote a pamphlet against his teacher under the title *Defensio simplicitatis ecclesiae*. In this work he cleverly points out the mistakes which arose from Maresius' lack of familiarity with the Hungarian conditions. He expresses himself against the holidays and the prescribed liturgical forms and proves to be a champion of the pure Presbyterian form of church government. Szathmári's answer greatly offended Maresius, but he thought it beneath his dignity to take the challenge of this young man, therefore he wrote his reply under a pen name. His pseudonym answer was retorted by two pamphlets from the pen of the pertinacious Szathmári.

In the meantime the focus of Puritan activity had been shifted back to Sárospatak. Susanne Lórántfy, this noble patrona of the Puritans, had been estranged from her headstrong son, George Rákóczy II, and moved, with her younger son, Sigismund Rákóczy, from Transylvania to Sárospatak, which was the centre of her vast estates. Here they exerted their great influence to promote the Puritan aims. In the summer of 1649 Tolnai was reappointed President of the Sárospatak College and resumed his educational efforts which were interrupted six years previously. Paul Medgyesi, who was at this time in the employment of the Prince's widow and her son, was commissioned by the latter to write a book about presbytery. Medgyesi published his work next year, in 1650, under the title *Dialogus politico-ecclesiasticus, that is, the Conversation of Two Christians about the Ruling Elders* . . . This large book is the most important publication of the Hungarian Puritan movement. It gives a long

Scriptural exposition of the consistory ; fully describes the office of the ruling elders ; opposes the view of those who would be willing to accept the Presbyterian government only if the offices of the Senior and Superintendent would be continued—the fallacy of this view being that, while the consistory is divinely instituted, the Bishop's office is not—and disproves the arguments which were marshalled by the contemporary nobility against the consistories. These arguments can be boiled down to three : it is more desirable to govern the Church by educated ministers than by uneducated people ; the consistories would distract the serfs from their work ; the landed lords would refuse to stand on equal footing with their serfs in the consistory. In the same year Medgyesi published a homiletical book also, entitled *Docce nos orare, quin et prædicare*. . . . This work, which is of a strong Puritan spirit and is written chiefly from English sources, calls Puritanism “ a blessed heresy ”.

VII

To raise the standard of the Sárospatak College, Prince Sigismund Rákóczy¹ called John Amos Comenius, Bishop of the Bohemian Brethren, and Tolnai voluntarily gave his Presidential chair to this famous educationalist. There was a slight misunderstanding between the Puritans and Comenius, because the latter, shortly before coming to Sárospatak, sent several copies of his work, *Independentia aeternarum confusionum origo*. This book was an attack on Independency, yet the Hungarian Puritans, who were not Independents, took offence at it, and it took a long time to find a way of co-operation with Comenius, who was the most outstanding reformer of education in the seventeenth century.

At this time, owing chiefly to the influence of Susanne Lórántfy and Sigismund Rákóczy, the synod of the Zemplén Diocese adopted a resolution which recommended the *presbyteriale regimen*. There were several other resolutions of a similar nature in various parts of the Diocese, but none of them was carried into practice. There were also resolutions to the contrary effect. For instance, the Synod of Liszka in 1651 postponed action in introducing the consistories and commissioned several members to reprimand Tolnai for his “ Independency ”. Tolnai,

¹ On the initiative of the Puritans, especially of Tolnai.

however, declared that he regarded Independency as the device of Satan.

The Puritan ranks suffered a great loss when Sigismund Rákóczy died on February 4th, 1652.

In the same year consistories were organized in Sárospatak and Királyhelmec on the initiative of Susanne Lórántfy. The volume of literature on the Puritan issue began to grow. Many pamphlets and books were published *pro et contra*. Medgyesi's "Short Teaching about the Presbytery or Church Council" appeared in 1653. Caspar Csulyak Miskolczi's "English Independency", purported to be a disinterested survey of the English events, but really was biassed in favour of Episcopalianism. Stephen Telkibányai's "English Puritanism" was a free translation of Ames' *Puritanismus Anglicanus*.

Throughout the whole course of the Puritan movement an altogether undue attention was given to two liturgical questions. One was the question of the so-called *prima elevatio*. According to the old Hungarian liturgy, the minister, in administering the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, lifted the elements twice; first, when he said the words of institution, and secondly before he gave the elements to the communicants. Of course, no idea of transubstantiation was involved and the elements were not raised to be worshipped by the congregation. Nevertheless, the Puritans, in an effort to restore the simplicity of the ceremony, and on the ground that Jesus himself lifted the elements only once, eliminated the *prima elevatio*. This unauthorized innovation gave rise to a controversy which was waged for over a decade and produced prolific literature. The other question was as to whether our Lord meant the Lord's prayer to be a mere pattern, or an integral and essential part of the public worship. The Hungarian Puritans took the view that the use of the Lord's Prayer as a part of the public worship was optional.

The dispute about the *prima elevatio* took such dimensions that certain conservatives sought the aid of the State to discipline those who introduced the new order of administering the communion into their Churches. Their argument was that, since the laws of the country secure the freedom of religion explicitly to the Church of the Helvetic Confession, any deviations from the doctrine and practice of the Church forfeit the liberty of the "innovators" and jeopardize the Church herself. The Hungarian Diet, however, although many of its members were

opposed to the Puritans, took no action with regard to the reforms.

Susanne Lórántfy thought that a National Synod could settle the controversy. Paul Medgyesi disagreed with her on this point. He preached a sermon in Sárospatak in which, quite in the spirit of Independency, he proclaimed that the function of the synod is only consultative and not judiciary and legislative.

The chances of the Puritan reforms were far less favourable in the Transtibiscan district and Transylvania than in the Sárospatak region because the former parts were within the easy reach of George Rákóczy II, this despotic opponent of the Presbyterian principle. Yet in spite of him the Puritan movement was making headway both in the Transtibiscan district and Transylvania. The College of Nagyvárad had developed into a Puritan stronghold under the protection of its generous patrona, Susanne Lórántfy, and in defiance of the enactment by the Transylvanian Diet in 1653, which prohibited any agitation in the interest of the reforms, the Puritan idea kept on winning new adherents. Thus John Csere Apáczai, Professor of the Gyulafehérvár College, proved to be a thorough-going Presbyterian in his work entitled *Hungarian Encyclopaedia*. His activity did not meet the approval of George Rákóczy II. This despotic and over-ambitious Prince, who had neither the wisdom nor the piety of his father, had long ago turned against the reformers and became confirmed in his anti-Presbyterian prejudices, when he was informed of the revolutionary turn of affairs in England. He was a great defender of the monarch's rights, and like James I must have thought that "a . . . presbytery agreeth as well with monarchy as God and the devil".¹ Whenever he thought of the fate of Charles I, his mind seems to have jumped to the conclusion which was expressed in the contemporary popular comment: ". . . The Presbyterians brought the king to the block, and the Independents cut off his head".² He thought that Presbyterianism would lead to Independency, which would ruin his country. His excitement was further instigated by an Episcopalian refugee, Dr. Isaac Basire, the Archdeacon of Northumberland and Chaplain to the king, who, as a partisan of the Stuarts, had to flee from England after the execution of Charles I. George Rákóczy II welcomed this man, and, on the

¹ D. Neal, *The History of the Puritans*, London, 1754. Volume I, p. 147.

² Leslie F. Church, *The Protestant Churches*, 1912, p. 72.

recommendation of Charles II,¹ appointed him to the deceased John Henry Bisterfeld's Chair in the Gyulafehervár College. As one would expect, he and Apáczai could not get along together. On one occasion the Prince provoked a public debate between the two men which was, however, cut short by the impatient Prince who threatened Apáczai that he would throw him into the Maros river. This threat was not literally fulfilled, but Apáczai was deprived of his Chair. Basire,² to boast of his unmerited triumph, published the debate under the title *Examen, quod D. Isaacus Basirius S.S. Theolog. Dr. ac Professor in augusta Celsiss. Transilvaniae Principis praesentia contra Presbyterianos Albae Juliae in Collegio instituit, anno 1655 die 24 Septembris*. This pamphlet was duly answered by the Presbyterians. In two further works Basire audaciously invoked Calvin's authority to support his thesis that while episcopacy is divinely instituted, presbytery is not. His feeble arguments were crushed by a Presbyterian who wrote his answer under the pen name of

¹ The letter of recommendation written by Charles II, to Prince George Rákóczy, was as follows :

" Charles by the grace of God of Great Britain, France, and Ireland King, Defender of the Faith, etc., to the most gracious High Prince, George Ragocy, Prince of Transylvania, Lord of the parts of the Kingdom of Hungary, and Count of the Siculi, our most deare friend and cousin sendeth greeting.

" MOST GRACIOUS AND HIGH PRINCE, and MOST DEARE Friend and Cousin,

" Whereas our trusty and wellbeloved Isaac Basire, Doctor of Divinity, by his most acceptable course of services, performed, as well to the Sovereigne Lord King our Father of blessed memory, (to whom he was chaplaine) and alsoe to ourselfe, and likewise for his universall knowledge, excellent learning, sincere preaching of God's word, for his indefatigable travells, to propagate the Christian Faith, and his unblameable integrity of conversation, hath exceedingly well deserved from the Church of England, and from us ; it was most welcome newes to us, which we lately received, that after noe small losse of his goods in England, and the great troubles which he hath suffered for his constant loyalty to us, he hath bene so graciously entertained by your highness that he hath found with you a singular comfort in the midst of his afflictions, in that your highness is not only pleased to make use of his service, but also to promote his studies by a liberall provision; for this favour we returne unto your highness our hearty thanks, and will be ready with noe less affection, when occasion shall offer to make retribution ; meane while wee doe earnestly intreat your highness, that what grace you have already freely of your owne accord afforded him, you would be pleased to confirme unto him for our sakes, and, by a further demonstration of youre benevolence towards him, so ingage him, that he may be sensible our recommendation of him to your highness hath bene of great weight to his advantage : we are confident, that, being obliged to your highness for such favours, and soe freed from other cares, he will devote himselfe wholly to your service, and soe will therein studiously employ all his care, duty, and diligence, in promoting God's glory within your highness's dominions ; untill God, out of his own compassion to our bitter afflictions, shall restore us to our kingdomes, when we shall recall him to his former functions, that we may reward him with a compensation, proportionable to his merits ; meane while it remains only, that we doe heartily recommend your highness to God's perpetual protection.

" Dated from Collen, the 26th Nov, Anno Domini 1655, and of our raigne the 7th yeare.

Of your Highness,

The good cousin,

CHARLES REX."

Quoted from *The Correspondence of Isaac Basire, D.D., Archdeacon of Northumberland and Prebendary of Durham*, by W. N. Darnell, B.D., London, MDCCCXXXI, p. 129.

² Basire's mind is well characterized by the following sentence from his letter to his wife, dated Padua, June xix, 1649.

" As for hopes of peace, I am verily persuaded no king, no peace, and no bishop, no king."

(Quoted from same source, p. 102.)

Philalethes Vester and under the title *Trecentumviratus et ultra, sive Calvinus, Beza, Zanchius, Danaeus, Szegedinus, Junius et plerique omnes*. . . .¹ He pointed out that Basire set out from a false premise when he assumed that the government of the Transylvanian and Hungarian Churches was Episcopalian, whereas the Transylvanian and Hungarian Churches were actually governed by presbyters, teaching elders, i.e. ministers.

VIII

Now the steady march of the Puritan movement was irresistible. The Synod of the Zemplén Diocese adopted a liturgy for the administration of the Lord's Supper which eliminated the *prima elevatio*. Presbyteries were being organized in many places. One of the greatest obstacles of the Puritan reforms was removed by the fall of George Rákóczy II. But his fall meant the ruin of his whole country. As the ally of Charles X, King of Sweden, he made an abortive attempt for the throne of Poland. His mad adventure, on which he staked everything he had, ended in a dismal failure. Transylvania was invaded and devastated by the Turks, Tartars and Poles. Hundreds of villages, towns and cities were utterly destroyed. Churches and schools were demolished and libraries pillaged. The destructive plundering left the people in utter poverty. "The Golden Age of Transylvania" had passed. Medgyesi, with the sorrow of the prophet lamenting over ruin and disaster, preached his inspired sermons on the "woes of the Hungarian people". A period of utter chaos followed. The central power had disintegrated. There was no power to enforce the laws which were made against the Puritans. As the triumph of the Presbyterians, Peter Kovásznai, a man famous for his radical Presbyterianism, was elected Bishop of the Transylvanian Reformed Church. True to his conviction, he accepted his appointment for one year only and remarked that "he does not feel any greater grace upon him in his new office than in his former state". He naturally used his utmost influence and authority to bring about the final victory of Puritanism. Now consistories were being organized not only in Transylvania and the annexed parts, but in Hungary proper also. The Presbyterian principle was being freely proclaimed. The victory of the Puritan movement was a tragic one.

¹ A Hungarian historian reported to have seen this book in the Archives of the Chapter of Durham.

Transylvania had fallen, and the Protestant population of Hungary proper had been reduced by the movement of re-Catholicization to a minority, and those who had still remained loyal to the faith of their fathers, were severely persecuted. Many of the patrons had returned to Roman Catholicism and the orphaned congregations had to organize their presbyteries or *consistoria*, often out of sheer necessity. Thus the effort of the Hungarian Puritans to establish the order of Ruling Elders fully succeeded. John Tolnai and Paul Medgyesi, these two champions of the Puritan cause, had died before seeing the harvest of their sowing.

The balance of the Puritan movement is altogether on the credit side. The Hungarian Puritans had their weaknesses and mistakes. They were often censorious, self-willed and insubordinate and, in their reforming fervour, they failed to take into account the special difficulties of the Hungarian Reformed Church, such as the constant wars, the imminent danger of re-Catholicization and the fact that the country was religiously so heterogeneous. Yet history has already rehabilitated the Hungarian Puritans, and we believe that the future development of the Hungarian Reformed Church will fully justify their endeavours.

ALEXANDER CZEGLÉDY.

Budapest, Hungary.