

## CHAPTER I

### THE BOOKS OF SIBYL

From the foregoing analysis it is obvious that in its ultimate result the Habsburg monarchy fell down on the national problem through its inability to solve it. All the centrifugal forces were national or at least they appeared under this mask, as the particularism of feudalism, the struggle of the bourgeoisie for administrative jobs, or the land hunger of the peasants. The economic and political analysis of these movements is a comparatively easy task. But anybody who studied these movements carefully felt distinctly that they were not exhausted by purely economic and political motives but that certain irrational and imponderable elements were attached to them.

Something mysterious, something religious, always surrounded the national aspirations, the immense creative force of which was clearly understood by the great theorists of these movements, such as Herder, Mazzini, and Fichte. That is the reason why they were capable of giving a clearer diagnosis of the national movement and its probable consequences than those thinkers as, for example, Marx and Engels, who saw only the political and economic side of these problems. The German efforts for unity, the struggles of the minor Slav peoples for emancipation, seemed to them only secondary issues. Perhaps nobody emphasized more vigorously the irrational character, the deeply sentimental and traditional nature of these problems than the eminent Transylvanian statesman, novelist, and political thinker, Baron Sigismund Kemény, who lived through the Hungarian revolution of 1848 and the bloody drama of the national struggles. This writer likened the national problem to the books of the Sibyl, remembering the Roman legend according to which the prophetess offered twelve holy books to the king Tarquinius for a certain price, and when the king found the price too high, she threw one-half of the books into the fire and asked for the remaining half the same price, and when the king continued to hesitate she threw into the fire all but one of those left, for which the king was constrained to pay the same price as she asked for the twelve. Remembering this ancient legend, Kemény made the following statement concerning the national movement of his age:

We understand that national claims have arisen which ask for solution and have this in common with the books of the Sybil, that the later the attention is drawn to them, the more heavy the price will be which we must pay for them, and the less will be the advantage secured for the public will. . . . .

Indeed the leading circles neglected terribly all the national problems of the monarchy; they misunderstood them completely, treated them in a narrow and frivolous way. It would not be too much to assert that the national question appeared with the force of a mass psychosis, the real nature of which was rarely understood, either by its leaders or by its antagonists. The struggle was carried on often for slogans and sentimental symbols which belonged more to the sphere of a religious creed than to the normal party and class struggle.

The real gravity and content of the problem was darkened in the first place by the rigid habits and judgments of value of those who held the power. The reigning nations regarded only themselves as true nations, whereas those under their rule were only second-rate nations. These so-called "state-sustaining nations," the German bourgeoisie and bureaucracy in Austria, the nobility in Hungary, in Croatia, and in Galicia were so imbued by the consciousness of their leading rôle that they felt the national awakening of their former bondsmen masses as almost a social impossibility. They viewed, until the very moment of the collapse, all these historical processes through the spectacles of their ideology of supremacy. Generally speaking, the reigning classes were entirely incapable of a sympathetic understanding with the national aspirations of the oppressed peoples. Whereas the national minorities lived mostly in an almost ghetto-like seclusion, isolated in language, in customs, and very often in religion from the ruling society.

The danger of this prejudice was heightened by an absolute theoretical blindness concerning the nature and origin of national movements which characterized the members of the upper classes with very few exceptions. This blindness became fatal when the absolutistic state was replaced by the democratic forces. The leading circles did not try to solve the problem but rather to maintain their former national privileges which they simply identified with the very interest of the state.

In a time when superficial observers could already see that the German-Magyar hegemony, the dualistic constitution, had definitely collapsed in the turmoil of the World War, the Germans leaders continued their adventurous plans in their often-quoted memorandum, the so-called *Belange*, to guarantee the German character of Austria and its centralist constitution by the elimination of Galicia, and utilizing the absolutistic means of the seemingly victorious militarism. At the same time Magyar feudalism firmly opposed all efforts which tried to reform the constitution in a spirit more favorable for the Slavs until the last moment of the monarchy. Quite symbolically characteristic of the rigidity and haughty intolerance of this point of view, is the visit of Count Stephen Tisza in Sarajevo on September 14,

1918, where he was sent by the Emperor as *homo regius* in order to seek a possible expediency in the southern Slav question, the extreme gravity of which became manifest. In this conference of an awful consequence, the most powerful statesman of the monarchy, rightly regarded as the dictator of Hungary, manifested a behavior which the reader could not understand without the knowledge of that chauvinistic dogmatism and petrified ideology of power which always characterized the Magyar upper classes. I feel it necessary to narrate this interview somewhat in detail, as it was reported by the Slovenian deputy, Mr. Korošec, the later prime-minister of Yugoslavia, in the session of the Austrian parliament of October 2, 1918, because it speaks more clearly for the psychology of the dissolution of the monarchy than any theoretical analysis. It occurred at a time when the whole Jugo-Slav world was in a revolutionary fervor and when the victory of the Entente was already undoubted even to the average man on the street, six weeks before the final collapse of the monarchy. Deputy Korošec gave the following report of the *pourparlers* of Count Tisza, based on the information of his co-nationals at Sarajevo, which was later corroborated from several sides:

That Count Tisza traveled as a *homo regius* became evident from the speech of General Sarkotić (the military governor of Bosnia-Herzegovina) and also from other signs of his trip. How did this *homo regius* behave himself in Sarajevo and how did he receive the politicians? He did not even offer a seat to them. They were obliged to stand before him as schoolboys. Count Tisza said that the memorandum of the deputation was wrong and called the right of self-determination of the nations a counterfeit. Then he made the following declaration, "It may occur that we must perish. But before we perish, we shall have enough power to smash you." Tisza, who appeared in the uniform of a colonel, lashed his horseman's whip against the memorandum, which he termed a stupidity. He even said that if the Jugo-Slavs were in Hungary he would cast them off. The Jugo-Slavs will always be grateful that the Emperor and King had sent such a man to them. . . .

It also became public later, from this memorable interview, that Count Tisza was very much surprised by the affirmation of one Mohammedan member of the deputation, of Dr. Mehmed Spaho, according to which antagonisms had entirely ceased, which formerly existed among Serbs, Croats, and Mohammedans. The most powerful statesman of the monarchy again did not know important mass-psychological facts, with which every Jugo-Slav student was acquainted. That such and similar things were possible can be explained only by that ideology of power already referred to, and by another outstanding psychic feature of the system, namely, that the former Emperor and his dualistic staff, with a kind of moral repulsion, kept themselves aloof from all facts and incidents which could trouble their interests and traditional point of view. Again the powerful but narrow-minded

personality of Count Tisza is a chief witness for this tragic ostrich-like policy. One of his great admirers, Benedict Jancsó, the well-known Hungarian publicist, by accident got possession, October 18, 1918, of the fourth paragraph of the treaty which the Rumanian government had made with the representative of the Entente at Bucharest (in August, 1916) and which fixed the future frontiers of Rumania. Jancsó ran with his announcement into parliament, and showed to Tisza the point of the contract. Tisza read it, and answered: "That is impossible, that is absurd! And you, Professor, do you believe this?" "As I am a Catholic, my device is, *credo quia absurdum*," answered Jancsó. Tisza laughed and asked his informer to note the new frontier on a map, and after having seen the new boundary, he exclaimed "Oh! In this case Geszt, too, falls within the new boundary!" (One must know that the great estate of Tisza was in the village of Geszt.) To this Jancsó replied: "Yes, Excellency, Geszt falls within the boundary, and you will protest in the parliament of the future greater Rumania against the peace treaty, *comme un député protestataire*. . . ." Tisza smiled again.<sup>1</sup> In this manner the traditional atmosphere and moral values of the estate of Geszt which determined his whole policy pressed with such a demoniac fatality on the soul of this "super-man" even in the moment of the agony of the monarchy.

But the mental and moral structure of the rising nations, too, was no more propitious for the solution of the national problems and for the right settlement of the serious conflicts than that of the ruling nations. The great majority of these peoples came without any transition into political life after the exploitation and immobility of their serf-existence of many centuries. Even the most modest beginnings of a civic education were entirely lacking among them. Living without any material or moral independence during many generations, as passive instruments of the landlords and of the official authorities, led by a superstitious rather than a moral religiosity, it is only natural that these masses were devoid of any thoughtful and rational national program. On the contrary, their national efforts were full of age-old emotional elements partly of a social and partly of a mystic origin.

It is no wonder if, in such surroundings as economic oppression, political impotence, illiteracy, the chronic semi-starvation of the masses (the *faim lente* of Proudhon was a regular aspect of social life in the backward parts of the monarchy), and a superstitious emotional and formalistic religiosity, every mass-movement had the tendency to become extremist. There was a credulous mysticism in the great masses of the population, legends originated easily, and had a wide repercussion, arousing the fantasy of the people. We saw, for

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Dr. Géza Supka in the collective work of some liberal leaders, *After Five Years* (Budapest, 1923), p. 163. In Hungarian.

instance, that the popular reforms of Joseph II led to bloody explosions. Later around the tragic death of Crown Prince Rudolph new legends originated which had even a certain rôle in the drama of Sarajevo. In wide circles of the Jugo-Slav population a fantastic and absurd tale had easy currency, namely, that the murderer of Francis Ferdinand, Gavrilo Princip, was actually the illegitimate son of the wife of Rudolph, Crown-princess Stephanie, whom the royal lady had educated for revenge on the murderer of her husband, Francis Ferdinand. The reader will realize that with masses on such a low level of critical power it was scarcely possible to carry on a rationalistic policy in a modern sense.

Another circle of legends among the adherents of the Greek Orthodox and even in the Greek United church was related to the person of the Tsar, as the head of the orthodox church, who was worshipped by the backward population of many remote villages, and the picture of whom could be seen in the wretched cabins of the Ruthenian peasants. Naturally, these bigoted cults of the unknown Tsar remained not on a religious ground but sometimes assumed a semi-national ideology, fructified by the Russian political emissaries in order to create a pan-Slavistic feeling.

If all the statesmen in the Danubian empire had been men of the caliber of Comenius or Pestalozzi, even then the problem which was to educate every people in its own special national culture without disruption of state solidarity would have been one of the most difficult with which statesmanship was ever faced. But in the dual monarchy there were very few men led by common interests and humanistic points of view in the state and local administration, but as we shall see in detail, the machine of the whole state was moved in the first place by the rigid class interest of the feudal nobility and the financial capitalism attached to it. This feudal atmosphere envenomed the whole intellectual, moral, and political background of the monarchy and became the focus of all centrifugal tendencies.

## CHAPTER II

### MORBUS LATIFUNDII

When we treated the centripetal forces of the monarchy, we saw that the outstanding feature of the Habsburg structure consisted of the preponderance of aristocracy and the high clergy as the chief maintaining elements of the absolutist power. The old particularist feudalism was replaced by a loyal and dynastic one, but the history of the monarchy remained from the beginning until the end a typically feudal history in the sense that aristocracy and church, based on their immense estates, were almost equal in power and influence to the will of the crown. The preponderant rôle of Austrian feudalism has already been emphasized several times and demonstrated by many examples. This picture must be supplemented with another trait. This is the long series of peasant revolts in Austrian history. The fatal antagonism between the opulent feudal aristocracy and the wretched peasantry ran like a red thread through it. The bloody waves of the great German peasant war in 1525 disturbed also many Austrian provinces. In the Alpine provinces, for a time the peasants became masters of the situation but soon they were cruelly suppressed. The exasperation of the peasantry broke out almost with the force of a sociological law, in the subsequent centuries too. Now here, now there, the fire of peasant revolts burst out. Particularly conspicuous was the peasant revolt of the upper-Austrian regions in 1626. Only with the help of serious military operations and utilizing the whole power of the state, could the feudal classes triumph over the serf insurgents. The last great peasant upheaval took place in Galicia in 1846, and its repercussion was so vehement that it became one of the chief incentives for the liberation of the serfs in the monarchy.

Even more preponderant was the feudal character of the state in the other half of the monarchy, in Hungary, where the essence of social life remained always agricultural. One can say without exaggeration that, with the exception of Poland before its partition and of Tsarist Russia, there was no other country in Europe in which the feudal church and nobility had such power. Whatever period of Hungarian history we may investigate, the sounding lead of the historian will always run onto the sand of feudalism.

It has already been mentioned that the very expansion of the Habsburg monarchy over Hungary was intimately connected with this feudal anarchy. The catastrophe at Mohács which led to the dismemberment of Hungary, to the death of King Louis II, and to the acknowledgment of the Habsburgs is in a manifest causal connection