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Jacint Ronay. *Naplo: (Valogatas).* Budapest-Pannonhalma: Magyar Egyhaztorteneti Enciklopedia Munkakozosseg (METEM), 1996. 400 pp. 896 HUF, paper, ISBN 978-963-8472-15-1.

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The diary of Jacint Ronay offers insight into a dramatic and turbulent period of mid-nineteenth century Hungarian history. At critical points, events tossed participants around as if they had been thrown overboard in stormy weather. Some swam to safety, others drowned tragically. Jacint Ronay was one of the survivors, thanks to his adaptability, love of hard work, and a great deal of good luck.

Ronay's figure is an excellent prism through which to examine life and politics in the Age of Reform, not in Pest but in the countryside, tensions within the church, life behind the lines during the War of Liberation, the intricacies of refugee life in Great Britain, and finally the coming together of moderates, both liberals and conservatives, in rebuilding the country after 1867.

Ronay's diary belongs to an extensive memoir literature. It lacks Aurel Kecskemethy's cynicism and mordant wit, and it falls short of the literary merit of memoirs by Ferenc Pulszky and Alajos Degre, both of whom painted a colorful social, political, and cultural panorama in their respective books. But Ronay's diary is vastly superior to cut and dried factual narratives by Laszlo Szogyeny-Marich or Jozsef Madarasz, and more reliable than General Klapka's remembrances.[1]

The author was born Janos Leitzinger in 1814, in Szekesfehervar, an historic old town in Transdanubia. The young boy was among the fast-growing group of mostly urban residents who, under the impact of education, and in his case literary influences, shed their non-Hungarian heritage and became passionate Magyar patriots. In school, he devoured cheap novels and plenty of romantic bombast by the likes of Andras Dugonics and Sandor Kisfaludy. The dreamy and sentimental disposition of his youth accompanied him throughout his life. Sadly, a lawsuit, a frequent curse in his times, struck down and ruined his family. The consequences for the Leitzinger family were catastrophic. The parents confronted the young teenager with their strong wish: that he enter the priesthood. In that way, he would cease to be a burden on his family. Young Janos was shocked, as he had no inclination to become a priest, but his sense of filial obligation prevailed over his attachment to worldly pleasures. "I shall become a Benedictine," he announced to his greatly relieved parents. He was already in the Pannonhalma Monastery in 1831 when he suddenly felt the weight of his decision and burst into tears.

In the same year the prior, Kristof Szecsenyi, persuaded the young novice to keep a diary. "A diary," he told Jacint Ronay, as Janos Leitzinger came to be known in the monastery, "encourages self-knowledge, which, in turn, leads to self-control, so that one will not become a victim of emotions, a prisoner to passions." In the romantic age, love of emotions and passions was frequently off-

set by fear of their potential adverse consequences. Ronay followed the prior's advice, if not always his admonition. From 1831 on he wrote down, day by day, "the joys and complaints" of his life, first "in childish great details," and later "in a more sober and general manner." Nevertheless, the even tone, a certain sense of distance, and consistency in these selections of the diary suggest that, following his retirement in 1883, Ronay wrote up and refined his contemporaneous notes. He published the diary in eight volumes in the period between 1884 and 1888.[2]

The volume under review is a mere fraction, then, of the original. The historian Tamas Katona's introduction is written in his customary elegant style and is a fine but incomplete summary of Ronay's life and activities. Gyorgy Holvenyi's postscript on the church is brief and competent. However, a discussion of the criteria for selection is totally missing. This is unfortunate, the more so because only a comparison to the complete diary could shed light on what was included and what was left out, but this diary is available only in Budapest and London. Also missing are detailed annotations that would help readers less familiar with the period's history. Strangely, the names of persons in an otherwise good index have no page numbers affixed to them.

In the early part of the diary Ronay describes what it was like to be a novice in the various Benedictine monasteries. Discipline could be strict or relatively free, depending on the abbot. In the Bakonybel Monastery, under the guidance of Abbot Guzmics, the atmosphere was relaxed and patriotic. "The monastery," Ronay wrote, "was permeated by a Hungarian spirit, and we heard Cicero's language only in church and in the lecture hall." This contrasted with Pannonhalma, where Ronay wrote Hungarian plays and poems. "When I brought one of my poems to a superior," he remembered, "he extinguished my enthusiasm by saying that he would recommend only a Latin poem for publication. This behavior provoked outrage among my fellow patriotic novices."

At this juncture, it is interesting to try to explain the tolerance of secular activities and beliefs among priests in Hungary on the part of the generally ultraconservative church leaders. State control over the church had grown from relatively light under Queen Maria Theresa to heavy-handed under Joseph II. Josephinian policies were essentially retained by Joseph's successors. On balance, state supervision weakened the church. Appointments were predicated more on political reliability than on pastoral or theological excellence. The council that headed the administration of the country (***Helytartotanacs***, ***Statthaltereirat***) regulated the bishops' income and the education of priests, and went so far as to prohibit monastic orders, in 1806, from importing prayer books from abroad. At the same time, in deviation from strict Josephinism, certain previously banned monastic orders such as the Benedictines were allowed to function again from 1802 on. A National Synod of 1822 resolved to restore morality, confiscate immoral books, prohibit the employment of foreign tutors, eliminate touring theater companies. These and similar other points could not possibly be realized by the church.

What appeared within reach was an attempt by the church leaders to block intermarriages between Catholics and Protestants and, if that was not possible, to make certain that the children of such unions were brought up as Catholics. These attempts were of course tantamount to preserving the church's privileged position in Hungary. The prelates' focus on this issue was so intense and their struggle so all-consuming that they allowed, by default, a certain degree of pluralism on other matters. One such matter was the promotion of secular Hungarian literature within the broader framework of a national cultural and political renewal. Gyorgy Fejer, Gergely Czuczor, Elek Gego, and Izidor Guzmics, and nameless others, all of them Catholic priests, were very much in the fore-

front of this renewal. Constituting a kind of informal fraternity within the church, these priests kept in touch with and supported each other. For instance, following ordination in 1836, Ronay began to teach in the Benedictine high school in Gyor. There, in 1847, he published a book on psychology. It was upon his good friend Czuczor's recommendation that Ronay was elected corresponding member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, also in 1847.

Although Ronay claimed to be apolitical, he was in Gyor, a liberal stronghold, and he maintained cordial relations with the liberal leaders there. After the outbreak of the 1848 revolution, Ronay accidentally--so he claimed--drifted to a large public meeting, where he then made a rousing patriotic speech, calling on the lower clergy to side with the revolution. He later mused about that event, wondering how differently his life would have turned out to be had he stayed home on that day. This rumination appears to be somewhat disingenuous, as Ronay did sympathize with the liberal cause, and his romantic love for drama and poetry made him eminently susceptible to a public role. In fact, for a series of public roles.

Defying the abbot's orders to return to Pannonhalma, Ronay became a military chaplain attached to Hungarian troops fighting the Austrians in the War of Liberation. He does not hide the glaring deficiencies of the early confused months of this war. His criticism, however, is strongly colored by hindsight, as he reminisces about the evils of vanity, irresponsibility, and a pursuit of illusory goals that he thought was prevalent in the fall of 1848. Ronay was aware, of course, that this was not how he had actually felt at the time. "It is easy to be wise thirty five years later," he wrote, "but in 1848 our feverish heart was nourished by beautiful and big words...Lajos Kossuth's splendid oratory was our wisdom." But not even the distance of thirty five years blunted the joy he felt over Hungarian victories in the spring of 1849, particularly over the retaking of Buda he had personally witnessed.

By the summer, as Russian troops poured into the country to aid their Austrian ally, the fortunes of the war suddenly turned against Hungary. Unlike some, Ronay did not abandon the cause. "I arrived at a defining moment in my life," he wrote, "and although my faith and trust are shaken, to betray our cause at this critical point would be cowardice. I shall go and face my fate even if that fate is death." This quote is credible, even if it was written later, because Ronay stayed with the defeated Hungarian armies to the bitter end. When the war was over, Ronay went into hiding. Several of his friends were caught, but Ronay was lucky; he slipped out of Hungary in May 1850. After a brief stay in Hamburg and Brussels, he arrived in London on July 10, 1850.

His background certainly left him unprepared to cope with a highly advanced and dynamic urban society; for one thing, he spoke no English. With delicious irony he remembered all the ancient languages he had to learn as a novice, not only Greek but Hebrew, Syrian, and Chaldean, but in Great Britain "I was mute." Doggedly learning English, he related how "I did not spare any time or effort and even during nights I would sit up with my English grammar and dictionary." Pronunciation was another matter, as sometimes perfectly constructed sentences elicited no comprehension among his English listeners.

Ronay's progress was fast enough for him to resume teaching, his old profession. He became a tutor to English children, teaching them German, Latin, Greek, mathematics, calligraphy, and drawing. He also taught the two sons of Kossuth. In order to augment his income, Ronay responded positively to a request made in 1850 by Ferenc Csaszar, editor of the major newspaper in Hungary, the *Pesti Naplo*, to contribute unsigned articles for the paper, thereby proving that threads connecting the refugees to the old country were never completely broken.

Life in England opened up another world for Ronay, and he absorbed new impressions with alacrity. He too was caught up in the general enthusiasm that surrounded the 1851 World Fair. Every day for a whole week, he spent an average of six hours there. "The machines made the greatest impression on me," he remarked, "and for hours I kept admiring the human mind that succeeded in bringing dead matter to life." While befriending mostly fellow Hungarians, he did reach out to others as well in the numerous refugee communities then present in London. He met, among others, Lamartine, Ledru Rollin, Mazzini, and Victor Hugo.

Hungarians were generally popular in England at the time, so much so that in 1851 a group of Italian and German refugees pretended to be Hungarians to get a larger share of charitable contributions. Ronay was a keen observer, and he gave an apt depiction of several refugee communities, characterizing the Polish as "boundlessly enthusiastic for hopeless conspiracies," the Germans as "endlessly theorizing," and the French as "engaging in constant internecine political warfare."

His primary observations, however, were focused on the host nation and on his fellow Hungarians. Much as he was grateful to the British for their hospitality, Ronay noticed early their idiosyncratic behavior, living in a world of their own, thinking of their own customs as the only proper ones, expecting foreigners living in Great Britain to conform, tolerant of British but not of foreign eccentrics, etc. Ronay nevertheless understood that the British should not be judged by continental standards. Moreover, he was amused by the enthusiasm of the Londoners for anything new, so contrary to the stereotype of British reserve, and he naively thought that no talent in Great Britain would go unrewarded because opportunities were so ubiquitous there. He enjoyed the free-wheeling debates in Hyde Park and in the House of Commons. Ronay remained enough of a Hungarian to favor the Whigs over the Tories, because Disraeli denounced the Hungarian freedom fighters as rebels.

The Hungarian refugee community caused Ronay his bitterest disappointment. Unbeknownst to him, the problem was not with the character of Hungarian refugees as much as with the predicament of refugees anywhere and at any time. This problem is perceptively discussed in Tamas Katona's introduction. Many refugees wished nothing more than to enter the mainstream in Great Britain, but the more they succeeded, the more they would remove themselves from the particular concerns of the Hungarian refugee community. Many of those who remained "stuck" there either failed to adapt to the circumstances of their new country or they became "professional emigres," mired in mutual recriminations and scapegoating. "I thought," Ronay sadly noted, "that my compatriots would face their common misery as friends and brothers, bound together by mutual trust and honor. I did not reckon with vanity that kills friendship, poverty that undermines character, and idleness that destroys morality."

Ronay was also a scientist, interested in geology, biology, and in questions of evolution. He did in fact play a role in the dissemination of Darwin's ideas. A book he published in Pest, in 1864, was based in its entirety on the ideas of Darwin, Huxley, and Lyell.[3] This aspect of Ronay's life is deemphasized in this book; there is only a brief hint in the postscript at his pioneering Darwin's ideas in Hungary. It is a central point in Lajos Pal's short biography of Ronay, published in Budapest in 1976. Pal did have access to the complete diary, and he mentions entries that registered Ronay's early interest in Darwin's *Origin of Species*.[4]

It is interesting how the ideological bias that to a lesser or greater degree characterized Hungarian historiography during the decades of Soviet domination now continues to some extent in a contrary direction. While Pal, in 1976, naturally placed the emphasis on Ronay the scientist, and

particularly Ronay the Darwinist, except for the hint mentioned above the book under review is mute about the latter, as if it were a black mark on Ronay's otherwise unblemished record.

At one point in his book, Pal chides Ronay for sliding back in a 1871 speech from his original position of not considering the Creation in his scholarly works.[5] In fact it would be wrong to draw the inference that a long stay in the secular world and his attachment to Darwin's ideas undermined Ronay's faith. It is true that he did not wear his faith on his sleeve, and his foray into radically new scholarship reveals an open mind. Nor did he appear dogmatic in other instances either; when, for instance, he reproached his old friend, Sandor Lukacs, for his participation in freemasonry, his criticism was not based on the presumed anticlericalism but on the secretiveness of this organization.

In a letter to a trusted friend, Ronay questioned the commitment of his old nemesis Mihaly Rimely, the abbot of Pannonhalma between 1842 and 1865, to the "religion of love," clearly Ronay's preferred definition of Christianity. This abbot's refusal to seek permission from authorities in Vienna was the principal reason why Ronay could not return to Hungary in the early to mid-1860s, when rapprochement between the Hungarians and the court was making its first tentative steps. Rimely died in 1865, and his successor promptly arranged the permission. Ronay proudly jotted down the total sum he had earned during his sixteen years stay in Great Britain, thirty thousand and five hundred pounds, said farewell to his "unforgettable second fatherland," and returned to Hungary in September 1866.

The reentry was by and large smooth. Ronay was always a passionate 1848er rather than 1849er. While he briefly supported full Hungarian independence in 1849, he was essentially a political moderate who enthusiastically endorsed Ferenc Deak's accomplishment in striking a compromise with the court on the basis of the legal-constitutional continuity linking 1848 to 1867. Upon his return, numerous rewards came Ronay's way in the period from 1867 through 1873: full membership in the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, election to the Parliament in Ferenc Deak's Party, tutor to Crown Prince Rudolf, and later to his sister, Archduchess Maria Valeria, appointment to the Upper House, and to a titular bishopric. The honor of administering the last rites to the dying Ferenc Deak in January 1876, also fell to him. Ronay retired in 1883 and received the title of Privy Councilor from the court. He kept traveling, going to meetings, and writing his diary. He died on April 17, 1889, only a few months after the suicide of his onetime pupil, Crown Prince Rudolf.

Ironically, the diary's major weakness is also one of its strengths. The fact that Ronay essentially wrote it late in life, albeit on the basis of his notes, means that the diary lacks the immediacy of the present, the spontaneous reactions to events as they were unfolding. At the same time, it shows a fascinating amalgam of past and present, thinking that reflects on his past self, old and new thoughts and emotions compressed into a synthesis that had become the moderate conservative liberal foundation of Hungary around and after 1867.

Notes:

[1]. Miklos Rozsa, ed., ***Kecskemethy Aurel naploja 1851-1878*** (Budapest, 1909); Ferenc Pulszky, ***Eletem es Korom*** (1880; most recent ed.: Budapest: Szepirodalmi Konyvkiado, 1958), 2 vols,; Alajos Degre, ***Visszaemlekezeseim*** (1883; most recent ed.: Budapest: Szepirodalmi Konyvkiado, 1983); Laszlo Szogyeny-Marich, ***Idosb Laszlo Szogyeny-Marich Emekiratai*** (Budapest: Hornyanszky Viktor Cs. es Kir. Udvari Konyvnyomdaja, 1903), 3 vols.; Jozsef Madarasz, ***Emlekirataim 1831-1881*** (Budapest: Franklin-Tarsulat Konyvnyomdaja, 1883); Gyorgy Klapka, ***Emlekeimbol*** (1850 in German, 1886 in Hungarian; most recent ed.: Budapest: Szepirodalmi Konyvkiado, 1986).

[2]. Jacint Ronay, *Naplotoredekek: Hetven ev remenyei es csalodasai* (Pozsony: [s.n.], 1884-1888), 8 volumes.

[3]. Lajos Pal, *Ronay Jacint* (Budapest: Akademiai kiado, 1976), pp. 119-120.

[4]. Ibid., p. 137.

[5]. Ibid., p. 175.

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