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AN INTERVIEW WITH LOUIS KOSSUTH.

ON the 27th inst. Louis Kossuth will complete his ninetieth year, and this event in the life of the most venerable of living patriots is to be celebrated in many interesting ways. Deputations of Hungarian Nationalists, some members of whom bore arms in the brief but eventful struggle which ended at Világos, are to visit the nonagenarian hero at his home of voluntary exile in Italy and present him with addresses and other tokens of admiration and esteem. Nor will marks of reverent appreciation be confined to admirers of his own race. From every country in Europe congratulations will be sent to the one man who in a century of opportunism and compromise has remained, alike in political fortune and in exile, a stern embodiment of inflexible patriotic principle.

My object is not to write a sketch of Kossuth's career or a defence of his political actions. His own story as related in "Memories of my Exile" would make any such attempt an absurdity on my part. I only propose to recall an interesting conversation which I was privileged to hold with him in Turin in February, 1887, in which interview he was pleased to discuss with me several questions of considerable public interest, including that of Ireland.

The day after my arrival in Turin, I made my way to the offices of the Alta Italia Railway, on the beautiful boulevard Vittorio Emanuele. I soon found myself in the presence of the chief engineer of that railway, who is the eldest son of Louis Kossuth. I was courteously received and welcomed to Turin. I disclosed the purpose of my visit, and was informed that the old patriot was over eighty years of age and seldom received visitors. Many American and English tourists sought him out as one of the lions of the city; but, as their object was mere curiosity, he rarely granted an audience. Young Kossuth assured me, however, that, apart from the introductory letter with which I had been favoured, his father would be pleased to meet me. He advised me to call at his residence between two and three in the afternoon, after he had taken his usual constitutional.

Punctually at half-past two I called at No. 22, Via dei Mille, a house—or, rather, block—with one common entrance, respectable, but not sumptuous, in appearance, and looking out upon a square—with some pretensions to passing as a small park—at that time covered with snow. On inquiring from the concierge the way to Kossuth's apartments, she directed me to a door next the top of the first landing. The name "Kossuth," on a well-polished brass plate, invited a knock, which was at once responded to by a man-servant, who conducted me into an ante-chamber which was very plainly furnished, and hung round with a few pictures and maps. Immediately after sending in my card I was ushered into the adjoining room, where, seated behind a desk upon which piles of books and newspapers lay in order and neatness, I saw the man who

in 1848-9 riveted the attention of all Europe upon his acts, and who for many years after was received throughout the world as an illustrious and incorruptible patriot exile.

He is a man about five feet nine, little bent for his age of eighty-three (1885). Hair as white as snow, with beard of moderate length of the same colour; black velvety skull cap; dress the perfection of neatness, also black; features calm and agreeable, with blue or light grey eyes, completed a picture of him who stood up to receive me, and, with a winning smile and courteous demeanour, bade me welcome to his home. The room had the appearance of being a study, in which the occupant went through a deal of literary work. Maps and photographs hung round the apartment. Cases well stocked with books, seemingly of all European languages, occupied the corners, while a huge correspondence bureau or document-holder extended the whole length of the side wall. I commenced by apologising for the intrusion, knowing how few visitors he was in the habit of receiving. To this he smilingly replied that he was pleased to make my acquaintance, apart from my being the bearer of a letter from one who had been among his many staunch friends when in exile in England. "But," remarked the old man, in what appeared to me to be a melancholy tone, "I am almost forgotten by the world now. I have lived here about seventeen years, and in walking along the streets of Turin I am a stranger to the people whom I meet." I ventured the opinion that he was mistaken in the impression that he was forgotten, so far at least as the political world was concerned, and I recalled the deep interest that was taken both in England and America in the publication of the "Memories of my Exile." "Some English and Americans call here in the tourist season," he replied, "but as I know they are only actuated by curiosity, I return them my card in exchange for those that are left with me." He offered me a cigarette and, on lighting one for himself, he appeared to become more cheerful, and we began a general conversation. I asked for an expression of his opinion on the political situation on the Continent, and what he thought of the social question which was now coming so rapidly to the front in nearly every European country. The new colonial policy of Germany and Italy he believed to be resorted to by the respective Governments of these countries in the hope of diverting the attention of the working classes from the Socialist programmes at home. "England, by aid of her colonies," he remarked, "has so far succeeded in getting rid of her redundant population, and thereby steering clear of the revolutionary movements which have been giving such trouble to her Continental neighbours. Germany and Italy are endeavouring to follow her example, but, in my opinion, it is too late." Speaking of France, he contrasted her European position to-day with what it was in 1848. "At that time she led all Europe in political thought and progress. Now, when actually a Republic, she had less influence over the political development of

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Continental opinion than when she was struggling against the intrigues of most European courts and the domination of the Bourbons." He ridiculed the statesmanship which wasted the resources and damaged the prestige of France in the insane expedition to Tonquin. "How Bismarck must rub his hands with intense glee," said he, "when seeing French soldiers, ships, and treasures sent so far away from the neighbourhood of Alsace and Lorraine!"

On the purely social question he spoke with apparent reluctance; at least that was my impression. "Here in Italy," he remarked, "there is little on the surface of political life to indicate what really exists underneath, and which will explode before long. Not only Socialism, such as you have described as making its appearance in England, but Anarchism has got a strong hold on the minds of Italian working men. They have their societies in every street, and propagandists in every large workshop. They talk openly of the time when the doctrines of Communism will be put into practical operation, and when the workers of society will exchange places with the capitalists and property holders in the control of the affairs of the State. The same feeling is manifesting itself all over Europe. The manifold crimes which society has committed against the people—the working classes—for generations seem to be generating an epoch of retaliation, and I tremble at the consequences to society. The stubborn opponents of reform are invariably the real parents of revolution, and unless what is called 'Society' will soon see the wisdom and expediency of legislating so as really to improve the social condition of the toiling masses throughout Europe—to lighten the burden of their lives and lessen the causes of their discontent—then all I can say is, 'God help that society when these masses, now rapidly educating themselves and studying the problem of life from their own standpoint of incessant and unjustly rewarded labour, take the task of achieving such reform into their own hands.' But I am too old to see the next great revolution; and I am glad of it, for it will be one with which that of 1789 will but poorly compare in its violence and bloodshed and the ultimate effect upon the destinies of mankind. I cannot call myself a Socialist, but if you were to ask me for a remedy for the evils which generate revolutionary Socialism, and out of which the next great revolution will spring, I must tell you I have none. God only knows the remedy!" After a short pause he added, "If the doctrines of Christianity, which are found in the New Testament, could be applied to human society, I believe the solution of the social problem could be got at."

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Having related to him what had occurred in Ireland since the foundation of the Land League, and, having described, at his request, what the aims and objects of the movement were, the old man expressed his pleasure at hearing that so much had been done towards settling the Irish Land Question. "I will tell you some experience of mine," added he, smilingly, "in efforts to bring about peace between England and Ireland. It was in 1854, I think, but I am not certain of the year, that, finding myself in England, I was forced by my sympathies towards Ireland to take an interest in the Irish cause, which presented so many points of resemblance to that of Hungary. Just about that time, if I remember rightly, there appeared to be disturbance in Ireland arising out of some agitation connected with the tenure of land. I one morning read an article in the London *Times*, written as if in a spirit of virtuous despair over the everlasting Irish problem. The writer seemed to contend that all that could possibly be done to satisfy the Irish people had been either accomplished or attempted, and he wound up his article by asking, who under heaven could suggest a remedy for this ever-recurring Irish trouble? I was 'green enough,'" said the old patriot, "to believe that this was written in sincerity, and I immediately sat down to the task of writing a letter in which I described the old land system of Hungary. I pointed out that though this system retained a more feudal character than that of Ireland, still it stirred the Hungarian people to revolt against it. I next detailed the reforms which were effected in this system by our movement of '48, and then dwelt upon the security and satisfaction which followed to the cultivators of the soil. I advised that, as human nature was the same in Ireland as in Hungary, the application of the remedy to Ireland which had proved so successful in Hungary would effect similar results, and I ventured the opinion that if this were attempted a solution of the Irish agrarian difficulty would be found. I forwarded my letter to the *Times*; waited one, two, three days—a week, but no appearance of the letter in its columns. I then wrote privately to the editor, requesting the return of my manuscript if it could not be published. No reply. Not discouraged, I sat down and wrote a similar letter to the *Daily News*. The same result. Another to the *Morning Post*. No reply. I was then fully satisfied," said Kossuth, lighting another cigarette, "that Englishmen did not want to be told how to satisfy the Irish people; that they preferred going on misgoverning the country to honestly facing the simple problem of rendering your nation simple justice."

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Speaking of Hungary, in answer to a question of mine as to whether there would be any obstacles on the part of the Emperor of Austria to his return, he replied that no opposition whatever would be offered were he to go back to-morrow; "but I will never visit my country again," added he, proudly and sadly. "When in 1848 I was put forward as the representative of my people's right to independence

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I took up a position before the world from which I can never recede. Hungary has of its own accord accepted the rule of Austria. I never will. I have no hope of Hungary repenting of her action." And advancing and laying his hand upon my shoulder he repeated earnestly, "I want you to remember this with reference to your country as well as to mine, that that which force takes away, time or chance or fortune may restore; but a right which a people voluntarily surrenders is lost for ever."

I learned from him that although his sons were in a position to support him in his old age, he elected to earn his own livelihood by literary labour. His love of personal independence of any aid outside his own exertions is in keeping with his life's resolve never to abate one jot of the independence of his country. An inflexible adherence to principle, with a corresponding hatred of compromise in which right would have to give way to opportunism, seemed to me to be the key of his character. Many critics condemn him for having refused to join in the compact between Hungary and Austria. His exalted devotion to Hungarian independence was the theme of European praise before the cause of that independence was abandoned in the compromise which was carried out by Deák. Now, however, a faithful adherence to the same principle, through years of exile and suffering, is spoken of as "mere fanatical enthusiasm."

Doubtless the worship of a principle which makes exile and its trials and sorrows preferable to the possession of power and honours, within a defined and limited liberty in one's own country, appears fanatical and perverse in an essentially practical age. It is the want of virtue in ourselves which invites us to mock at a conspicuous measure of it in others. Kossuth's spirit is as much at variance with the ease and advantages of political compromise as the life of a religious ascetic is with the temptations of personal indulgence. But are political and religious intransigeants not the inevitable and indispensable standard bearers of all that is great and good in true human progress? And are they not, therefore, the mainspring of that measure of progress which less virtuous but more accommodating minds are enabled to achieve in the service of humanity? After all, those who laud Deák for his work in winning autonomy for Hungary pay unconscious homage to Kossuth, whose uncompromising patriotism and determination were the main factors in wringing a Constitution from Austria. The capitulation of Komárom may have sealed the fate of a separate Hungary, but it laid the foundation of Hungary's present legislative independence.

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