

KOSSUTH ÉS WEBSTER

In 1848 the Hungarians, under the leadership of Louis Kossuth, revolted against the rule of the Hapsburgs. For a time they seemed destined to succeed, and President Taylor dispatched A. Dudley Mann to observe developments and to recommend whether and when the United States should recognize Hungarian independence. The revolt was crushed through the intervention of Czarist Russia, and the Austrian Government took vehement exception to Mr. Mann and his mission. It called him a spy, and addressed an arrogant protest to the United States Government. This was delivered to Webster by Chevalier J. G. Hülsemann, Austrian Chargé d'Affaires in Washington.

Webster rose to the challenge. He asked his friend Edward Everett, as well as William Hunter of the State Department, to draft a reply. Then, into their circumspect diplomatic language, he inserted a bold, almost bumptious, statement of the manifest superiority of our principles of government over the absolutism of the Hapsburgs, saying:

The power of this republic, at the present moment, is spread over a region one of the richest and most fertile on the globe, and of an extent in comparison with which the possessions of the house of Hapsburg are but as a patch on the earth's surface. Its population, already twenty-five millions, will exceed that of the Austrian empire within the period during which it may be hoped that Mr. Hülsemann may yet remain in the honorable discharge of his duties to his government. Its navigation and commerce are hardly exceeded by the oldest and most commercial nations; its maritime means and its maritime power may be seen by Austria herself, in all seas where she has ports, as well as they may be seen, also, in all other quarters of the globe. Life, liberty, property, and all personal rights, are amply secured to all citizens, and protected

Lewis, Waller: Speak for yourself, Daniel.
Houghton, 1969

THE FILLMORE ADMINISTRATION

by just and stable laws; and credit, public and private, is as well established as in any government of Continental Europe; and the country, in all its interests and concerns, partakes most largely in all the improvements and progress which distinguish the age. Certainly, the United States may be pardoned, even by those who profess adherence to the principles of absolute government, if they entertain an ardent affection for those popular forms of political organization which have so rapidly advanced their own prosperity and happiness, and enabled them, in so short a period, to bring their country, and the hemisphere to which it belongs, to the notice and respectful regard, not to say the admiration, of the civilized world.

It would be idle now to discuss with Mr. Hülsemann those acts of retaliation which he imagines may possibly take place at some indefinite time hereafter. Those questions will be discussed when they arise; and Mr. Hülsemann and the Cabinet at Vienna may rest assured, that, in the mean time, while performing with strict and exact fidelity all their neutral duties, nothing will deter either the government or the people of the United States from exercising, at their own discretion, the rights belonging to them as an independent nation, and of forming and expressing their own opinions, freely and at all times, upon the great political events which may transpire among the civilized nations of the earth.

Needless to say, the letter did nothing to mollify either the Chevalier Hülsemann or his royal master, but it quickly became one of the most popular of all American state papers. This was, of course, just what Webster had hoped.

[Letter of Jan. 16, 1851, to Ticknor]

If you say that my Hülsemann letter is boastful and rough, I shall own the soft impeachment. My excuse is twofold: 1. I thought it well enough to speak out, and tell the people of Europe who and



SPEAK FOR YOURSELF, DANIEL

what we are, and awaken them to a just sense of the unparalleled growth of this country. 2. I wished to write a paper which should touch the national pride, and make a man feel *sheepish* and look silly who should speak of disunion.

The Hungarian affair was to have further repercussions for Webster. In December 1851 Kossuth staged a triumphal tour of the United States and received such an enthusiastic welcome that it greatly embarrassed the administration, and Webster as Secretary of State. In addition, the affair inspired the gift by Webster's friend Roswell L. Colt of some prize Hungarian cattle.

[Letters to John Taylor: Mar. 25, 1852]

Trenton, N. J., March 25, 1852

I am here, attending a court, and shall return to Washington about next Monday. Mr. Colt, of this State, an old friend of mine, has made me a present of three imported Hungarian cattle — one bull, one cow, and one yearling heifer. He will start them tomorrow for Boston, where they will be by the time you receive this letter; and I wish you to go immediately down and take them to Franklin in the cars. Mr. Colt does not like Kossuth, and requests that the bull shall not be called by that name. You may call him "Saint Stephen." I do not propose to keep these Hungarian cattle on your farm, to mix with your stock. We will find room for them in due time on the Sawyer place, or elsewhere. I enclose you a check for thirty dollars. When you have seen the cattle, write me and tell me how you like them.

[Apr. 21, 1852]

I am glad you are so careful with the Hungarian cattle. I would not have a fatal injury happen to either of them for five hundred dollars. As to St. Stephen, now undoubtedly the best bull in the

THE FILLMORE ADMINISTRATION

United States, I would be glad to keep him at Franklin, if I could afford it. But it is worth more than a hundred dollars a year to keep such an animal, as he is not only to be fed, but must have somebody to look after him, both summer and winter, and I suppose it cost one thousand dollars to buy him and bring him where he is, and I fear our farmers in the neighborhood will not be willing to contribute what is reasonable towards his cost and expense of keeping. I wish you would consult and inquire, and let me know what can be done. If cows are sent to him, some of them will come from a distance, and must be pastured. It will be a man's business to take care of him. Now, how many cows would be likely to be sent, and what price would the farmers be willing to pay? Those are the questions.

I do not wish to make any money out of such a concern, and wish to benefit all the neighbors; but I am not rich enough to bear the whole expense. He is wanted in western New York, but, if I could, I should prefer to keep him where he is. How old is he? and how old the cow and heifer?

In due course, St. Stephen tossed and gored John Taylor, who was saved only by his enormous strength. Prostrate on the ground, he managed to grasp the bull's nose ring and, by twisting it, kept him from further mayhem until help could arrive. On July 16, 1852, Webster wrote to Edward Curtis:

John Taylor has recovered from the bull; and a painter has come all the way from Boston to paint an animal that could throw John Taylor over his head. John Taylor entertains a very bad opinion of that bull, and says he is no more fit to run at large than Kossuth himself.

