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BARON MÓRIC KORNFELD

REFLECTIONS ON
TWENTIETH CENTURY
HUNGARY:
A Hungarian Magnate's View

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PREFACE

The career and the activities of Móric Kornfeld, industrial magnate, Maecenas and thinker are practically unknown in present Hungary. His name rarely appears in social histories and in the glossaries of names he is frequently confounded with his father, Zsigmond Kornfeld, the banker and stock exchange president. This volume endeavors to rediscover the individual who played a major role in the struggles of the period, who was a member of the Upper House of parliament and who finished his life in emigration. It presents some of his writings, most of which were written during the prime ministry of István Bethlen and published in the *Magyar Szemle* [Hungarian Review], which Kornfeld subsidized heavily. A number of these writings were cited recently by the historian Mária Ormos in her work, *A gazdasági válság magyar visszhangja* [Hungarian Echoes of the World Economic Crisis]. The major part of this volume, however, consists of his essays written in emigration and of letters addressed to him. It is in these that his attachment to the issues of history and philosophy become manifest, much more so than during the years when he was active in public life.

I have personally experienced the love and respect with which he is still remembered in Iregszemcse, that small village in Tolna County where, at one time, he had an estate of six thousand acres. He is remembered by many, and not just the old-timers, as the estate owner who provided many in the village with bicycles and sewing machines and who financed the Green Cross Nurse, who served as health care provider in the village. He is remembered as the man who provided a summer vacation each year for 250 young women, daughters of workers in the Csepel Manfréd Weiss Works. He is mentioned briefly even by the prominent writer Gyula Illyés in *Ebéd a kastélyban* [Lunch at the Chateau] as an astonishing exception from the domineering members of his class.

How can we summarize Móric Kornfeld's career? It was a tragic and complex journey. It began in great affluence and comfort during the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. In the belief that the nation would accept him just as it had accepted his father who had come from abroad and held different religious belief but served the nation well. He was firmly linked to the era of his father and to the ideals of the nineteenth century. He would have been happiest in the heyday of aristocratic liberalism. His inclinations linked him to the past and he had little sympathy for the new and tentative social experiments. He considered the country secure just as he felt secure in his social, linguistic and geographic position. Under the stresses of the war and the revolutions he honestly and with deep conviction sought a new identity in a religious conversion. He was remarkably cultured and profoundly learned, having both wisdom and spirituality. He was endowed with great wealth and knew that this imposed a duty and a responsibility. To some extent he was a captive of his class. His inclinations were philosophical and intellectual and he could not, nor did he wish to act differently. He wished to do good in a general way, sometimes forgetting the rules of capitalism that he represented and helped to sustain. In America he found a warm welcome. He could no longer be a Hungarian in Hungary, but he could remain a Hungarian in the United States. He was traveling both symbolically and in reality. His true home was the world of ideas and the world of ideals. His children and grandchildren, living in the United States, try to preserve their Hungarian roots.

We have endeavored to present the almost completely forgotten Móric Kornfeld as a representative of a historic society, which has disappeared, from a variety of perspectives. This seemed to be essential because a couple of years ago the literary journal *Holmi* [Matters] published two chapters of Lajos Gogolák's memoirs. This sketch presented the image of Móric Kornfeld as seen in a distorting mirror. Gogolák depicted Móric Kornfeld with contempt as a struggling specimen of a social class that had lost its base, had outlived its legitimacy and had developed increasingly unfortunate manifestations. The biographer of Zsigmond Kornfeld, József Radnóti erred in the opposite direction by depicting his subject in a completely idealized fashion. Gogolák, a notorious gossip, on the other hand, painted everything in the darkest pos-

sible colors. Yet he did report certain correct details that I have used in the present volume, having discarded the distortions and sarcasms.

Móric Kornfeld's portrait can be a model, and an outstanding example, for the economically and socially active individual who realizes that wealth represented a responsibility to others and who assumes the obligation of assisting others. He supported poor university students and enabled them to complete their studies, he sponsored scientific and artistic activities, endowed important publications and made sure that scientific and scholarly activities were recognized and suitably rewarded. Móric Kornfeld, in his role as Maecenas, can be an example and inspiration for the new men of wealth in contemporary Hungary.

II.

The Móric Kornfeld papers were sent back to Hungary by the family, together with the papers of his son-in-law, Aladár Szegedy-Maszák. They are preserved in the National Széchényi Library in Budapest. On the family's invitation I spent a few days in Washington and brought some of the papers back with me, depositing them as well in the Széchényi Library. They are available there for future study. It should be noted that two years ago, at an auction, "more than ten kilos" of Manfred Weiss papers and family correspondence from 1860 to 1910, were deposited in the Hungarian National Archives, waiting for future scholars.

I wish to express my deep appreciation to the late Professor Éva H. Balázs, a close friend of the family and an eye witness of the events of the 1930s and 1940s. It was she who brought this exciting subject to my attention and it was she who introduced me to members of the de Kornfeld family. In addition to her personal recollections of Ireg and the family home in Budapest, she was also most helpful in identifying individuals and their roles in the events, thus assisting greatly in my understanding.

I am also very grateful to Móric Kornfeld's children. I am thankful to them for the opportunity to become acquainted with the Kornfeld papers, for my trip to Washington, to the house on Patterson Street

where Móric Kornfeld spent the last two decades of his life. Tamás DeKornfeld made the greatest contributions to this volume. I have also consulted repeatedly with the nonagenarian Mária Kornfeld who always answered my many questions promptly and most helpfully. Hanna Kornfeld Szegedy-Maszák provided accurate and important information about the Szegedy-Maszák family. I extend my thanks to the family for giving me access to the family papers, the writings and photographs and for permission to publish them. I also extend my thanks to Daisy Chorin Strasser, the niece of Móric Kornfeld, for seeing me in Vienna.

I have received much and extensive help from my historical advisor, Professor Tibor Frank, an outstanding expert on the period under study and its various problems. I am grateful to Mihály Szegedy-Maszák and György Kövér for their comments on the introductory essay.

I have received generous help from Mária Moró, who made the material of the Pécs archives accessible to me. András Hegedüs, the librarian of the Primate's Library in Esztergom helped me in studying the Church-related documents. In my studies in Ireg, I was given much assistance by Mrs. Géza Gyugyi who showed me around the old Kornfeld chateau, presently a home and school for a large number of economically and mentally handicapped children. She also introduced me to older residents in the village and helped to reconstruct the events of many years ago. I am grateful to the staff of the Széchényi Library manuscript and duplication departments and to the staff of the photograph collection of the National Museum, particularly Katalin Jalsovszky and Emőke Tomsics.

I am indebted to the art historian, Melinda Tóth, for some previously unpublished data. The director of Corvina Press, László Kúnos, and the editor, Veronika Gspann, were consistently helpful in converting the manuscript into a book.

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2005