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From Our Own Correspondent:

Thomas O'M. Bird of *The Times* and the Hungarian Question, 1848-1866.

The Austro-Englishman

During the Hungarian constitutional crisis of 1905-6, the London-based historian Lajos Kropf added his voice to a spiteful press campaign demonizing *The Times*' Vienna Correspondent, Henry Wickham Steed. Steed had offended Magyar sensibilities by opposing the aspirations of Hungary's new Kossuthist parliamentary majority for greater national independence at the expense of the constitutional settlement of 1867.¹ Writing in *Budapesti Szemle*, Kropf explained Steed's policy in historical terms.² He proposed that Steed acted in accordance with *The Times*' longstanding tradition of "reviling the Magyar people" and "currying favour with an Austrian government drenched in Hungarian blood". Steed's precursor, according to Kropf, was *The Times*' first Vienna Correspondent, an obscure "Mr. Bird". Drawing on a Kossuthist pamphlet written by C. F. Henningsen in 1851,³ Kropf revealed that this mysterious "Mr. Bird" was one of the Austrian Emperor's most zealous supporters, and that he systematically suppressed all news that was unfavourable to the Imperial cause during the Revolution of 1848-9. As an example of Bird's depravity, Kropf claimed that the correspondent whitewashed the widely publicized lashing of a Hungarian gentlewoman, Madame Maderspach, by Austrian troops following the defeat of Kossuth's rebellion in 1849. Kropf had no problem accounting for Bird's hostility to the Magyar national cause: *The Times*' Correspondent had become thoroughly Austrianized as a result of long residence in Vienna, had been an employee of the Metternich family as an English teacher, and had probably been in the paid service of the Austrian government.

Kropf's "Mr. Bird" was the Surrey-born Thomas O'M. Bird. In a letter of introduction to Palmerston, written in mid-December 1848, Britain's envoy to the Habsburg Court, Lord Ponsonby described Bird - without revealing his connection with *The Times* - as a liberal-minded English teacher, who was prosperous enough to enjoy a comfortable home and private library. To snare the attention of his boss, Ponsonby wrote that Mr. Bird "knows, more or less, every man who has taken a forward part in the late transactions in this country, and can

¹ Géza Jeszenszky, *Az elveszett presztizs: Magyarország megítélésének megváltozása Nagy-Britanniában (1894-1918)*, Budapest, 1986, pp. 168-178.

² Lajos Kropf, "A Magyar Forradalom és a Times", *Budapesti Szemle*, vol. CXXVI, Budapest, 1906, pp. 1-14.

tell you a great deal which you probably would never otherwise hear.”⁴ Ponsonby referred specifically to Bird’s friendship with the Austrian Justice Minister, Alexander Bach and his close association with the family of the former Chancellor, Prince Metternich. Ponsonby apparently hoped that a relationship between Bird and Palmerston would counter the pro-Magyar influence of the Foreign Office agent, Joseph Blackwell, and encourage the Foreign Secretary to support the Austrian government’s programme for the amalgamation of the Habsburg lands into a modern unitary state.⁵

It is not known whether Palmerston received Bird. But irrespective of any personal encounter, the Foreign Secretary was, in fact, already acquainted with his perspective on the Hungarian Question. Through the medium of *The Times*, Bird was the most widely read writer of his era on the politics of Austria and Hungary, although his identity was, at that time, concealed by *The Times*’ policy of anonymity. On average two to three times per week, from October 1848 until the eve of the settlement of 1867, Bird provided Europe’s most powerful newspaper with news and views regarding political developments in Hungary. During his 18-years with *The Times*, Bird received mixed reviews from the Hungarian national movement. Kropf’s sole source on Bird, Henningsen, first revealed him in 1851 as *The Times*’ Vienna Correspondent, and portrayed him as a corrupt, Magyarphobic hack. But less than a decade after the publication of Henningsen’s exposé, even Kossuth himself had to admit that “the good fellow Bird” had performed valuable service to the Hungarian nation.⁶

When Kropf claimed that Bird had become Austrianized, he was hardly stretching the truth. Bird established himself in Vienna in the mid-1830s, and seems to have gone native. In a letter to his friend, Alexander Bach, he described himself in 1849 as an Austrian subject.⁷ According to the testimony of a cousin, Bird, played “the part of a courtier”, and assumed “ever-changing fashionable garbs and manners of what may be rightly termed artificial life”.⁸ Bird claimed to have travelled frequently to Hungary during the *Vormärz*, but what he did there remains a mystery. All he subsequently recorded in *The Times* about those visits was the strong impression of the “very slender tie” binding Hungary to the Empire and the Magyars’

³ Charles Fredrick Henningsen, *Kossuth and The Times: Containing Curious and Important Information concerning “Our Own Correspondent” of The Times*, 4th ed, London, 1851.

⁴ University of Southampton Library, Broadlands Papers, GC/PO, ff. 589/4-5, Ponsonby to Palmerston, Private, Vienna, December 16, 1848.

⁵ Éva Haraszti-Taylor addresses the conflict between Ponsonby and Blackwell in: J.A. Blackwell, *Magyarországi küldetései 1843-1851, Budapest 1989*, pp. 362-3.

⁶ Kossuth to Jósika, November 5, 1860, printed in: Lajos Kossuth, *Irataim az emigrációból*, vol. III, Budapest, pp. 166-7.

⁷ Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Nachlass Bach, kt. 2, Bird to Bach, [October]1849.

strong “dislike and contempt for their Austrian neighbours”.⁹ At home in Vienna, Bird rubbed shoulders with politically progressive Austrians at the reformist *Leseverein*. The Revolution plunged Bird deeper into politics. While his employer fled to England for safety, Bird remained behind. Like most of Vienna’s English residents, he welcomed the change of government in March 1848, believing that it heralded a new era of constitutional liberty. As an Austrian subject, his support for the new order went much farther than most Englishmen dared to go. Bird placed a red feather in his cap, joined Vienna’s 4th National Guard Company, and helped build a barricade near his Franziskanergasse home. He was not, however, a radical revolutionary. On the 6th of October, when Viennese radicals attacked Imperial troops leaving Vienna for action against the Hungarian government, Bird fought on the side of the Imperial authorities. Before the end of the month, Bird had become *The Times*’ “Own Correspondent” in Vienna, very likely through the influence of Metternich or Ponsonby.

When Ponsonby described Bird as a liberal, he reflected accurately Bird’s self-image. His political principles included British-style constitutionalism, equality before the law, anti-clericalism and free trade. But he was an old-school liberal in so far as he was entirely immune from the attractions of modern nationalism based on language. Bird was a champion of the prevailing view in Britain that a strong, Habsburg Empire was vital for the preservation of the European balance of power. Both Bird and *The Times*’ Editor, John Delane, believed Austrian and Hungarian statesmen could do no better than to emulate the British statecraft that transformed England, Scotland and Ireland into a legislatively united state. A united, constitutional kingdom of Austria and Hungary was *The Times*’ goal, and Bird shared it. But with the passage of time, Bird - far more than his editor - doubted whether this dream was attainable.

The Counter-Revolutionary

The first Hungarian challenge facing Bird at the end of 1848 was Kossuth’s rebellion. While much of London’s liberal press sympathized with Kossuth, Bird was implacably opposed to the man and his separatist agenda. In his view, not only Kossuth, but also the other principal members of the constitutional Hungarian Ministry of 1848, particularly Counts Szechényi and Batthyány, had been striving for complete national independence. He had no faith in Kossuth as a statesman, or in the ability of an independent Hungarian state to successfully replace the

⁸ TNL Archive, Bird File, Henry S. Watts to the Proprietor of the *Times*, Brighton, August 4, 1871,

⁹ *The Times*, From Our Own Correspondent, Vienna, May 11, 1861, published on May 15, 1861.

Habsburg Empire in the balance of power in Europe. The violent nationality conflicts within the Hungarian Crown Lands during the Revolution, which Bird blamed primarily on the fanatical excesses of Magyar nationalism, provided ample proof of the unviability of independent Hungarian statehood. The Magyars, as Bird viewed them, did not possess the strength required to turn the Hungarian Crown Lands into a stable independent state. While Bird regarded the Magyars as standing higher on the totem-pole of civilization than the Slavs and Romanians, Magyar ascendancy depended on the Hungarian nobility's habit of drinking from the font of a superior German culture.¹⁰ Convinced of the Magyars' inability to create a political entity capable of replacing the Habsburg Empire in the European balance of power, Bird campaigned energetically against Hungary's War of Independence, urging the Imperial authorities not to compromise - as Delane was wont to do when the Magyars appeared to gain the upper-hand - but to crush it. The Austrian executors of ex-Minister-President Batthyány and other rebel leaders found a staunch defender in *The Times*' correspondent. Bird saw the need for severe remedial measures of the sort that constitutional Britain used after putting down rebellions in Scotland and Ireland or in overseas colonies. However, contrary to Kropf's claims, Bird did condemn the Austrian authorities when he felt they abused power. For example, he described the flogging of Madame Maderspach as an "act of the most unmanly cruelty", and called the collective punishment of the Jews of Pest as "the very essence of tyranny".¹¹

The defeat of the Hungarian rebellion did not diminish the force of Kossuthist propaganda in Britain. With great skill and energy, Ferenc Pulszky maintained pro-Hungarian momentum in the press, which only reached a climax with the visit of the revolutionary leader to Britain in the autumn of 1851. Bird played a key role in *The Times*' largely successful counter-campaign, finding political dirt to fling at Kossuth and his cause. He recycled accusations that Kossuth had, in the 1830s, paid off gambling debts with embezzled government money that had been designated for the care of orphans, and that he had stolen valuables belonging to Count Ödön Zichy, who was hanged as a traitor by the Hungarian military. Bird also suggested that Kossuth was having an extramarital affair with Countess Dembinszky. In response to Kossuth's visit to England, Bird was authorized by Delane to help the former Austrian ambassador in London and Minister *a latere* in the Batthyány Ministry, Prince Paul

¹⁰ Bird's impressions about the character of Hungary's various nationalities were similar to those articulated at much greater length by A.A. Paton, who toured Hungary as *The Times*' "Own Correspondent" at the end of 1849. But never sought to denigrate the Magyar nation after the manner of Paton, who was keen to show that the civilization of the Magyars was not significantly higher than that of their Slavonic and Romanian neighbours.

¹¹ *The Times*, From Our Own Correspondent, Vienna, October 5, 1849, published on October 11, 1849; September 15, 1849, published on September 20, 1849.

Esterházy, write letters to his old friends, the Duke of Wellington and Lord Melbourne, expressing “very disadvantageous opinions of Kossuth’s private and political honesty”.¹² On the 1st of December, *The Times* published one of these letters, accusing Kossuth of “high treason”, and “terrorism”.¹³ Esterházy’s letter set in motion a barrage of similar attacks on Kossuth signed by such Magyar notables as Count Kázmér Batthyány, Bertalan Szemere and Count Gusztáv Batthyány, thereby exposing deep divisions in the Magyar national movement.

Bird’s assistance to Esterházy was known and approved by Delane. But this was apparently not true of his collaboration in the autumn of 1849 with Count Antal Szécsen. At the time, Szécsen held a diplomatic post at the Austrian embassy in London, and had had a series of letters published in *The Times* condemning the revolution in his native Hungary.¹⁴ While Bird was on leave in London, he agreed to disguise Szécsen’s authorship of a series of letters, and send them to *The Times*, from Vienna, as his own.¹⁵ The main points were that the preservation of the Habsburg Empire was a necessity for the peace of Europe and for the well-being of the Magyars and other nationalities; the political link between Hungary and Austria was no mere personal union like that formerly of England and Hanover; the Hungarian constitution provided the Hungarian nation with local self-government, but not independence; the deterioration of relations between Austria and Hungary was the result of Hungary’s determination to become an independent state in violation of the Pragmatic Sanction; and the illegal acts of the Hungarian government could result in the eternal loss of the special rights of the Hungarian nation and the enormous influence of the Magyars within the Habsburg Empire.¹⁶ Delane was not quick to publish the correspondence. It was not until January 1850 that *The Times*’ Manager, Mowbray Morris was able to inform Bird: “Your sketch of the Hungarian rebellion has appeared at last and your hand is now, I hope, at ease.”¹⁷ *The Times* proved to be the only effective press barrier in England to the Kossuthist spin on the Hungarian Revolution. Its success was due, in large measure, to Bird’s reporting.

Was Bird a paid agent of the Austrian government, as suggested by Henningsen and later Kropf? It is clear that he gave solid support to Schwarzenberg’s efforts to suppress the

¹² Delane to Dasent, Vienna, November 1, 1851, printed in Arthur Irwin Dasent, *John Thadeus Delane, Editor of “The Times”*: *His Life and Correspondence*, vol. I, London, 1908, pp.118-119.

¹³ *The Times*, “Prince Esterházy and the Hungarian Government of 1848”, Vienna, published on November 13, 1851.

¹⁴ *The Times*, “The Hungarian Question”, A Hungarian, no dateline, published on July 10, 1849.

¹⁵ Szécsen to Schwarzenberg, November 7, 1849, printed in Erzsébet Andics, *A nagybirtokos arisztokrácia ellenforradalmi szerepe 1848-1849*, vol. III, Budapest, p.430: Szécsen to Metternich, November 7, 1849, printed in Andics, *Metternich und die Frage Ungarns*, Budapest, 1973, pp.176-7.

¹⁶ *The Times*, “The Revolt in Hungary, Letters I-V, published on December 29, 1849, and January 1-4, 1850.

Hungarian revolution and pacify the county. It is also clear that the authorities in Vienna benefited from his anti-Kossuth propaganda. It is difficult to imagine that Bird's collaboration with Szécsen did not carry with it a financial reward. Within weeks of the publication of the Szécsen letters, Bird was offered a Professorship of English at the University of Vienna and an appointment as tutor to Francis Joseph's brothers. *The Times'* management had no strong objection. While recognizing that acceptance might place him under an obligation to the Ministry, Morris allowed Bird to take up the posts, believing that he would, as a result, have an advantageous connexion with the court.¹⁸ But while Bird's professional ethics may have fallen short of the highest standard, there is no conclusive evidence to show that his concurrence with the counterrevolution in Hungary was mainly the result of financial incentives from the Austrian government. He exhibited signs of being a true believer in the Vienna government's Hungarian policy.

As Bird looked beyond the period of retribution, he wished to see constitutionalism prevail in Hungary. But he rejected the reinstatement of the Hungarian constitution, with or without the controversial April Laws of 1848, and shed no tears over the Austrian Government's proposition that the late rebellion had blown it to the wind. He viewed the Hungarian constitution as a retrograde, feudal institution that existed exclusively to serve the interests of the Magyar nobility.¹⁹ He also objected to the disadvantages it imposed on national minorities, in particular the Southern Slavs, and believed stability required the separation of Bács, the Bánát and Voivodina from Hungary.²⁰ What Bird wanted - indeed regarded as a "necessity"- was the amalgamation of Hungary and Austria on the basis of a liberal constitution, including guarantees for the equality of nationalities. He had confidence in the liberal credentials of Schwarzenberg, Bach and Stadion, and believed that they could successfully bind Hungary to a constitutional Habsburg state. Their chosen instrument, the Constitution of the 4th of March 1849, appeared to fit the bill. If implemented successfully, Bird's dream of the Habsburg Empire joining Great Britain as a constitutional, unitary nation state would be fulfilled.

Enlightened vs. Unenlightened Absolutism

By the end of 1850, Bird had lost confidence in the Austrian government. He had come to the conclusion that its professed liberalism was a sham, and that it was the intention of Francis Joseph to keep the Empire a military-police state. The advocates of this 'unenlightened'

¹⁷ TNL Archive, Morris Copy-Book, vol. I, Morris to Bird, January 10, 1850.

¹⁸ TNL Archive, Morris Copy-Book, vol. I, Morris to Bird, February 20, 1850.

¹⁹ *The Times*, Austria and Hungary, September 3, 1849.

²⁰ *The Times*, From Our Own Correspondent, Vienna, September 21, 1849, published on September 27, 1849.

absolutism, Counts Grünne and Kempen, had triumphed over their ‘enlightened’ rivals, Bach and Stadion. Bird now saw the *octroi* Constitution of the 4th of March for what it was – a dead letter. He therefore went into opposition, and paid a heavy price. In June 1853, police agents entered his home and seized his papers. He was charged with inciting the public to sedition. Charges were not dropped until the beginning of 1854, as a result of the intervention of the Austrian Foreign and Justice Ministers.

Chastened by this brush with the law, Bird lowered his tone. Instead of explicitly attacking the government, he tried gently to encourage it to allow some modest representative institutions, instead of relying entirely on the bureaucracy and army. What Bird had in mind was the establishment of an Imperial Senate, with the right to control expenditure²¹, non-elected provincial diets with a role in local administration²², and the restoration of the self-government of the Hungarian Protestant Churches.²³ Such institutions, he reckoned, might one day blossom into genuine checks on the power of the Imperial government. Bird also warned the authorities to abandon the linguistic Germanization of Hungary. He was convinced that the imposition of German as Hungary’s official language served only to fan the flames of Magyar nationalism.²⁴ But Bird was not opposed to the state’s promotion of all German influence in Hungary. He supported colonization on the grounds that culturally and economically superior Germans would boost Hungary’s material development.

By the mid-1850s, Bird had come to the conclusion that the Vienna government’s policy of ignoring the Magyar nation was hopelessly flawed.²⁵ Hungarian passive resistance remained strong. Moreover, the government had failed to turn the non-Magyar nationalities into a powerful political counter-weight to the Hungarians, and the power of Austro-Germany was insufficient to keep the Hungarian Crown Lands in orbit around Vienna. As Britain drifted into the Crimean War, Bird saw the need for Francis Joseph to base the security of the Empire on a German-Magyar alliance. He had observed the susceptibility of the Slavonic and Orthodox populations, especially the South Slavs, to Russian influence, and believed that the

²¹ *The Times*, From Our Own Correspondent, Vienna, March 24, 1852, published on March 30, 1852; May 16, 1852, published on May 21, 1852.

²² Bernhard von Meyer, *Erlebnisse des Bernhard von Ritter ...*, vol 1, Vienna, Pest, 1875, pp. xxvi, xxviii. *The Times*, From Our Own Correspondent, Vienna, August 17, 1853, published on August 23, 1853; August 24, 1853, published on August 30, 1853; August 28, 1853, published on September 3, 1851; July 18, 1854, published on July 24, 1854,

²³ *The Times*, From Our Own Correspondent, Vienna, December 7, 1856, published on December 10, 1856; March 14, 1857, published on March 18, 1857; April 28, published on May 2, 1857; April 29, published on May 3, 1857.

²⁴ *The Times*, From Our Own Correspondent, Vienna, May 30, 1856, published on June 4, 1856; December 16, 1856, published on December 20, 1856; February 1, 1857, published on February 6, 1857,

²⁵ *The Times*, From Our Own Correspondent, Vienna, October 1, 1856, published on October 7, 1856.

essentially loyal Magyars would be able to anchor the Hungarian Crown Lands more securely in the Habsburg state.²⁶ However, Bird understood that the restive Hungarian nation would have to be conciliated before it could provide this service to the Crown.

Bird's hopes were raised in 1857 when Francis Joseph made his first extended tour of Hungary since a fruitless visit in 1852. "The concessions that the Government is prepared to make," Bird predicted, will "put them [the Hungarians] in a much better humour", and, while foreign affairs, the army and finances will remain "tabooed", the central Government would not ignore representations on any other subjects.²⁷ He had been tipped off that the conservative party would petition the Monarch for "an efficient representation of the country, and a provincial government, which, up to a point, shall be independent of the Ministerial departments".²⁸ Bird wanted to travel to Buda-Pest for the first time since before the Revolution, and write a descriptive account of the Emperor's grand arrival. Morris failed to see the political significance of the royal visit. "We don't care very much about the Emperor's doings in Hungary", he wrote to Bird. But despite his misgivings, Morris approved Bird's proposal. As politics were stagnant in both Vienna and London, Morris hoped that "the Magyars may keep us from yawning".²⁹ In what appears to be Bird's first dispatch from Hungary, he produced a colourful account of Francis Joseph and his entourage disembarking from a boat on the Pest bank of the of the Danube, and then crossing the chain bridge by carriage to the Royal palace at Buda.³⁰ But the very next day, Bird returned to Vienna, from where he covered the rest of the Monarch's doing in Hungary.

As Bird forecast, a petition signed by a host of prominent Magyars was conveyed to the Monarch. It stressed loyalty to the Crown and acknowledged the need to guarantee the unity of the Monarchy. But it also identified their chief complaints, in particular the abolition of all ancient constitutional institutions, the territorial division of the country, the introduction of the Austrian penal code, Germanization, and arbitrary taxation. Bird was impressed by the fact that some liberals had subscribed to the petition. Time had not healed his jaundiced view of the conservatives, whom he dismissed as "a score of nobles" committed to an archaic

²⁶ *The Times*, From Our Own Correspondent, Vienna, May 10, 1854, published on May 16, 1854; July 12, 1854, published on July 18, 1854.

²⁷ *The Times*, "Austria", From Our Own Correspondent, Vienna, February, 11, 1857, published on February 16, 1857; February 13, 1857, published on February 17, 1857; February 15, 1857, published on February 19, 1857.

²⁸ *The Times*, "Austria", From Our Own Correspondent, Vienna, April 18, 1857, published on April 22, 1857.

²⁹ TNL Archive, Morris Copy-Book, vol. VI, Morris to Bird, April 16, 1857.

³⁰ *The Times*, "The Emperor of Austria in Hungary", From Our Own Correspondent, Pesth, May 5, 1857, published on May 9, 1857; Vienna, May 6, 1857, published on May 11, 1857.

constitution and social structure. It was the Liberals, he announced, who really counted, for they represented nine tenths of the nation. Moreover, he reported, their programme was more “reasonable” than the Old Conservatives’ because of their desire for a modern constitutional system.³¹ Bird knew that the petition would not be “to the taste” of the authorities, but it took him nearly a fortnight to learn that it had been flatly rejected. So as to leave no doubt about the government’s intentions to stick with its policy, the Interior Ministry published a spirited defence of its Hungarian policy in Hungary, just one month after the end of the royal tour. The pamphlet, *Rückblick*, made the case that centralised absolutism had been successful in Hungary, and that the Hungarians ought to be grateful for the new political institutions that were responsible for producing such great benefits. Bird challenged this rosy assessment, stating that “well-informed and dispassionate” Hungarians assert that things are not progressing at all well in the Kingdom.³²

Bird was disappointed at Francis Joseph’s failure to respond positively to the Magyar petitioners. Meeting their modest demands, he thought, would have been a small price to pay for the benefits that were sure to accrue from reconciliation with the Hungarian nation. Not long after this missed opportunity, Bird sensed an ominous change in Hungarian public opinion. Hungarians no longer speak, he observed, of the provincial institutions promised by Francis Joseph.³³ They were growing impatient. All the Magyars wanted, Bird believed, was a little more respect for local languages and institutions; a little less German language and fewer German personnel in the administration; a little more magnanimous paternalism; a little less stern militarism and insensitivity in the bureaucracy; and a little better economic management. Genuine representative government could wait, but minor adjustments to the system would help consolidate loyalty and transform the disparate lands of the Empire into a strong modern nation state. Bird believed time was running out for Francis Joseph. The spirit of Magyar nationality was again on the march. Meanwhile, the Monarch urgently needed a more solid political basis for the fulfilment of his grand plans for the regeneration of Austria. Yet nothing of the sort was in sight.

The Making of a Dualist

The Austrian government did not come around to Bird’s way of seeing the Hungarian Question until military defeat in 1859 confirmed the failure of centralized absolutism. In the

³¹ *The Times*, From Our Own Correspondent, Vienna, May 13, 1857, published on May 18, 1857; May 23, 1857, published on May 26, 1857.

³² *The Times*, From Our Own Correspondent, Vienna, October 10, 1857, published on October 13, 1857.

³³ *The Times*, From Our Own Correspondent, Vienna, February 7, 1858, published on February 8, 1858.

ensuing political crisis, the Austrian authorities made a series of substantial concessions to Hungary: the Protestant Patent of September 1859, the reestablishment in April 1860 of local government according to traditional constitutional norms, with a view to electing Diets for the Hungarian Crown Lands, the establishment in May 1860 of a reinforced Reichsrath (Senate) to monitor and control state expenditure, and the proclamation of the October Diploma as a constitutional framework for the united Empire. All of this was to Bird's liking. But he refrained from giving the Vienna government his support. Hungarian public opinion had indeed moved on since 1857. Even before the war in Italy had come to an end, Bird knew that credible representatives of the Hungarian nation now demanded the complete restoration of its Constitution. Széchenyi and his political associates, with whom Bird appears to have had friendly and cooperative relations, had sent an anonymous letter to *The Times*, calling on the British government to encourage Francis Joseph to reinstate the Constitution, and thereby secure the loyalty of the Eastern half of his Empire.³⁴ Before the end of 1859, Bird had become aware that both the Old Conservatives and the Liberals were also making the same demand. What was distinctive about the programme of the latter, he reported, was the proposal to send delegates from the Hungarian Diet to Vienna once a year to settle Hungary's contribution to the Imperial budget, including supplies for the military, and the establishment of an independent committee to control Imperial finances.³⁵ Moreover, he announced that nothing would now satisfy the nation short of a return to a "personal union" between Austria and Hungary.³⁶

Of the various Hungarian political factions, Bird recognized that the Liberals had to be reckoned with by the Monarch. He was impressed with their leaders. Deák he described as a "patriot without spot or blemish", while Eötvös, he wrote, is "one of the best Hungarian authors", and is "generally liked and esteemed by his fellow-countrymen". Old Conservatives, such as Counts Szécsen, Zichy, Jósika and Mailáth, were "good men and true", but they had no popular following³⁷ As for the exiled Kossuth, Bird now viewed him as a threat only in so far as he was backed by the arms of foreign powers. Within Hungary, it seemed he had become a marginal factor. Kossuth's plan to erect a Danubian Confederation on the ashes of the Habsburg Empire had sealed his fate at home. The majority of Magyars,

³⁴ *The Times*, "Hungary", To the Editor of *The Times*, Pesth, June 24, A Hungarian who would like to be an Englishman if he were not a Hungarian, published on June 28, 1859.

³⁵ *The Times*, From Our Own Correspondent, Vienna, November 8, 1859, published on November 12, 1859.

³⁶ *The Times*, From Our Own Correspondent, Vienna, October 10, 1859, published on October 14, 1859.

³⁷ *The Times*, From Our Own Correspondent, Vienna, October 11, 1859, published on October 15, 1859.

Bird wrote, wanted no part of an independent confederation with Slavs and Romanians, and were convinced that their interests dictated remaining part of the Habsburg Empire.³⁸

In the post-war political crisis, Bird was caught up in a dilemma. He knew that the Vienna government had to break decisively with centralized absolutism, but he feared that the complete restoration of Hungary's Constitution could lead to the break-up of the Monarchy. From the peace of Villafranca to the proclamation of the October Diploma, Bird consistently found himself one step ahead of the government's reform program, but one step behind the demands of the Magyar nation. Finally, at the end of 1860, Bird made the big leap into the camp of the Magyar liberals. He could see no other way for Francis Joseph to save the Empire than by accepting their constitutional programme. Hungary appeared to be on the verge of revolution, with the possibility of support for the Magyars coming from France, Italy and the Balkans. According to Bird's trustworthy Magyar sources: "If Hungary is not satisfied and pacified before the spring the chances are that she will be lost to the empire for ever."³⁹ He observed with alarm that the Slovaks had already demonstrated against the Magyars, and expected that the government would again encourage the Croats, Serbs, Romanians and Germans to do likewise. But times had changed since 1848, and Bird believed that Francis Joseph would be the sure loser. In Bird's assessment:

"The Liberal Austro-Hungarian party is however, very powerful, so that the danger of a revolution, and possibly of a separation of the two countries may be averted if the Government speedily recognizes the validity of the laws of 1848."⁴⁰

This was the course Bird believed the Monarch had to take. Procastination would only increase the possibility that Deák and Eötvös might ultimately lose out to the Kossuthists. After all, he observed, only six weeks beforehand, the Conservative Baron Vay and Count Szécsen were the most popular men in Hungary, but now they were widely reviled as traitors.⁴¹

While the February Patent of 1861 raised Delane's hopes that Hungary would be drawn into legislative union with Austria, Bird pooh-poohed the notion. He thought it would be madness for Hungary to trade its ancient constitution for a flimsy piece of paper issued by an autocrat. Whereas Bird had formerly accepted the doctrine of the invalidity of the Hungarian

³⁸ *The Times*, From Our Own Correspondent, Vienna, November 8, 1859, published on November 12, 1859.

³⁹ *The Times*, From Our Own Correspondent, Vienna, November 21, published on November 27, 1860.

⁴⁰ *The Times*, From Our Own Correspondent, Vienna, November 23, 1860, published on November 27, 1860.

⁴¹ *The Times*, From Our Own Correspondent, Vienna, December 5, 1860, published on December 10, 1860.

Constitution, he now identified himself with Deák's constitutional arguments. He dismissed as "bosh" the notion that the Pragmatic Sanction established a "real union" between Austrian and Hungary, as maintained by Francis Joseph, instead of a "personal union", as maintained by Deák".⁴² What kept Bird in the Magyar camp was his confidence in Deák's ability to reach a settlement with the Monarch that would secure the great power status of the Empire. While Deák stood firm on the principle of "personal union", Bird observed, the Liberal leader would bring about revision of those aspects of the April Laws of 1848 that were incompatible with the essential unity of a dual monarchy.⁴³ Deák, it appeared, had found the way to reconcile the Magyar national aspirations with the preservation of the Habsburg Empire as a great power. Bird therefore backed him. When the Hungarian Diet met in April 1861, Bird urged Francis Joseph to settle quickly with the Deákists, warning again that dithering would allow the radical Teleki and his "wild Ultras" to gain the upper-hand.⁴⁴

Bird's coverage of the Hungarian Diet came to a premature end in early June when ill health forced him to leave his post for recuperation in Baden and Trieste. The Austrian Ambassador in London, Count Rudolf Apponyi, expressed relief in response to the suspension of Bird's "hostile" correspondence.⁴⁵ But to Apponyi's chagrin, Bird's substitute, the seasoned roving reporter, Fredrick Hardman, went to Budapest and took up the Hungarian cause with a zeal that was uncharacteristic of Bird. By the time the Monarch dissolved the Diet, Hardman and Delane were at odds, with the latter heaping pressure on the Diet to accept the principle of legislative union with Austria. *The Times'* management did not believe Francis Joseph could yield to Deák any more than Britain could yield to Daniel O'Connor without endangering the union of Great Britain and Ireland.⁴⁶

When Bird returned to his post in April 1862, the Hungarian Question was no longer a major press attraction. The threat of a French and Italian supported uprising had receded, thereby relieving Francis Joseph of the need to accept forthwith the Diet's demands. As a result of diminished public interest, Morris wanted only a weekly letter from Bird.⁴⁷ During the following three years of impasse between the Magyar nation and the Crown, Bird remained a critic of the Austrian government's Hungarian policy, believing all efforts to coerce the

⁴² *The Times*, From Our Own Correspondent, Vienna, May 8, 1861, published on May 13, 1861, May 14, 1861, published on May 20, 1861, published on May 20, 1861; May 20, 1861, published on May 24, 1861; May 28, 1861, published on June 1, 1861.

⁴³ *The Times*, From Our Own Correspondent, Vienna, February 2, 1861, published on February 8, 1861.

⁴⁴ *The Times*, From Our Own Correspondent, Vienna, April 15, 1861, published on April 19, 1861.

⁴⁵ Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, HHStA, PA VIII, no. 56, Apponyi to Rechberg, London, June 16, 1861.

⁴⁶ TNL Archive, Morris Copy-Book, vol. XI, Morris to Éber, August 15, 1861.

⁴⁷ TNL Archive, Morris Copy-Book, vol. XI, Morris to Bird, April 15, 1862.

Magyars into accepting legislative union were likely to fail. When, following the German intervention in Schleswig-Holstein, the growing threat from Prussia forced Francis Joseph to renew dialogue with the Hungarian nation, Bird again encouraged the Monarch to embrace Deák's proposals for a settlement.

In June 1865, Bird travelled to Budapest to witness Francis Joseph's sudden four-day visit to the Hungarian capital and assess the prospects for reconciliation. He judged them to be fair. At the end of the year, Morris instructed Bird to return to Budapest for the opening of the Diet. Morris reckoned that this parliament would settle the Hungarian Question and provide stability to the Habsburg Empire for years to come.⁴⁸ A reluctant, physically frail Bird complied with his master's wishes. He remained a fortnight, and returned again for the whole of February, staying at Budapest's prestigious Queen of England Hotel. Never before had Bird, as *The Times'* Correspondent, spent so much time in Hungary. The effect was heightened appreciation of the Magyars and their political aspirations. Magyar noblemen were "remarkably fine specimens of humanity". Their ladies, especially Countess Szennyey, were "remarkable for beauty, grace and amiability". Magyar officials were far more helpful to journalists than their counterparts in Vienna. The Magyar nation had "always been remarkable for its attachment to its Sovereigns". Not only was Deák "pure as gold", his opponents, the "Ultras", were now "reasonable men". The Magyars, though a "very loquacious race", were "much less dogmatical than the German inhabitants of the Empire"; the Magyars "listen with patience to the arguments of their political opponents, while the Germans admit of no contradiction". The Magyars now used foul and overbearing language less than they did in former times, and had learned to be less insulting to non-Magyars. Hungarian parliamentarians behaved with "tact and moderation". Bird had fallen under a Magyar spell. He could not find any reason why Francis Joseph should not throw himself and his Empire into the arms of the Magyars.⁴⁹

Bird did not see any great obstacle in the way of a rapid settlement. As he understood it, the outstanding differences between the Crown and the Diet were insignificant: The Monarch wanted Hungary to amend those aspects of the April Laws that were incompatible with the unity and great power status of the Empire before the appointment of a responsible Hungarian

⁴⁸ TNL Archive, Morris Copy-Book, vol. XIII, Morris to Bird, October 19, 1865.

⁴⁹ *The Times*, From Our Own Correspondent, Pesth, December 14, 1865, published on December 19, 1865; December 15, published on December 20, 1865; December 17, 1865, published on December 22, 1865; December 19, 1865, published on December 25, 1865; December 20, 1865, published on December 26, 1865; December 23, 1865, published on December 27, 1865; December 26, 1865, published on December 30, 1865; February 8, 1866, published on February 14, 1866; Vienna March 15, 1866, published on March 20, 1866.

Ministry, while the Diet insisted that the appointment of a Ministry and full recognition of the April Laws by the Monarch should take place before the amendment of the April Laws. Bird sided with the Diet, using the old adage “safe bind, safe find” to vouchsafe the wisdom of the Magyars’ refusal to sacrifice constitutional continuity in return for mere reassuring words. Bird was incensed in March when Francis Joseph rejected the Diet’s position, and returned to Vienna leaving a committee of 67 deputies to amend the April Laws. Bird knew it would take months for the committee to fulfil its function, and that there was no guarantee that its end product would be acceptable to the Crown. The political affect of Francis Joseph’s hard-line, Bird predicted, would be to make the Magyars less conciliatory, and to encourage them to take advantage of Austria’s difficulties with Prussia. Meanwhile storm clouds were gathering over Central Europe, and the Empire was in political disarray. Bird could not fathom Francis Joseph’s unwillingness to settle swiftly with the Diet. But he recognized the shilly-shallying as entirely consistent with the Monarch’s costly habit of yielding too little too.⁵⁰

Events justified Bird assessment of Francis Joseph’s handing of the Diet. Within four months, Austria - handicapped by the unresolved Hungarian Question - was embroiled in war with Prussia. Bird covered the conflict from Vienna, while *The Times* commissioned the celebrated war correspondent, William Russell, and a military specialist, Captain Charles Brackenbury, to move with the Imperial army on the northern front. In the aftermath of the decisive Prussian triumph at Königgrätz, Bird witnessed preparations to transfer the Imperial capital to Budapest, and feared for the rapid dissolution of the Empire. Worried by the cluelessness of the Imperial government, Bird urged Francis Joseph to “restore to the Hungarians the rights of which they have so long been deprived”. He was convinced that the nation would, in return, produce an abundance of loyal and patriotic recruits to fight Prussia.⁵¹ It was on the vast resources of Hungary that Bird pinned hopes for a reversal of the Empire’s fortunes of war and the preservation of her great power status.

Bird’s advice fell on deaf ears. Rather than attempt to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat by embracing promptly Hungary’s offer of dualism, Francis Joseph submitted to military defeat and Austria’s expulsion from Germany. Acceptance of Prussia’s terms for peace did not immediately extricate the Habsburg Empire from crisis. Bird was demoralized by the Imperial government’s poor military and political performance. He was also physically ailing. On the 12th of August he wrote a letter of resignation. Morris responded by asking him to

⁵⁰ *The Times*, From Our Own Correspondent, Pesth, February 28, 1865, published on March 5, 1865; Vienna, March 15, published on March 20, 1865; March 24, 1865, published on March 28, 1865.

remain at his post for another six months to cover the post-war reorganization of the Empire.⁵² Bird agreed, but took the following month off to recuperate. Upon his return to Vienna, he was dismayed to find that “so many difficulties arose in the way of ‘dualisms’ that ‘nothingisms’ appear to have prevailed”.⁵³ It was not until the beginning of November that Bird was reliably informed that further concession would in fact be offered to Hungary. Although Delane had launched a post-war rear-guard action against dualism, Bird professed himself to be “heartily glad” at the prospect of a settlement between the Crown and Hungary.⁵⁴ But feared that Francis Joseph would yet again fail to meet the essential conditions set by the Magyar nation.

On the 8th of November 1866, Morris accepted Bird resignation.⁵⁵ Bird was no longer physically up to his responsibilities. The task of reporting on the settlement of 1867 fell to a Captain [Charles?] Ross, who had long experience in Austria. Bird left Vienna for a cottage on his brother’s farm in Petworth, Sussex. He died in 1871, and was buried in the churchyard at Sutton, Surrey, only a few miles from his birthplace. During nearly two decades of service to *The Times*, Bird played an important role in helping Hungary achieve prestige in Britain as a vital component of the European balance of power. As an Austro-Englishman, Bird was committed above all to the preservation of the Habsburg Empire as a great power, in alliance with Great Britain. But he was something more than the anti-Magyar agent of Austrian absolutism, as portrayed by Kropf and Henningsen. By the mid-1850’s he could no longer ignore the reality that the Habsburg Empire could not adequately fulfil its function in the European balance of power as long as the Hungarian nation was disaffected and steadfast in passive resistance to the Vienna government. While Bird consistently opposed Kossuthist separatism, he came around to supporting the Hungarian nation’s demand for autonomous government on the basis of the country’s constitution. With the passage of time, he became convinced that the Magyar nation was not at heart a nation of separatists, but was bound by powerful national interests to the Habsburg Monarchy. After the most inauspicious of beginnings, Bird became a reliable ally, if not a devoted friend of Hungary, and used his influence to help the Magyar nation recover constitutional institutions, power within the dualist Habsburg Empire, and influence in Europe.

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⁵¹ *The Times*, From Our Own Correspondent, Vienna, July 14, 1866, published on July 18, 1866.

⁵² TNL Archive, Morris Copy-Book, vol. XIV, Morris to Bird, August 17, 1866.

⁵³ *The Times*, From Our Own Correspondent, Vienna, September 14, 1866, published on September 18, 1866.

⁵⁴ *The Times*, From Our Own Correspondent, Vienna, November 3, 1866, published on November 7, 1866.

⁵⁵ TNL Archive, Morris Copy-Book, vol. XIV, Morris to Bird, November 12, 1866.

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