

II.

NOTICE OF A BOHEMIAN EXECUTIONER'S SWORD. BY PROFESSOR
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An interesting chapter of Bohemian history might be written in connection with a notice of the weapon now exhibited; or we might take it as the starting-point for an inquiry touching Executioners' Swords in general. The former would be out of place at present; the materials for the latter are scantier than past reading had led me to suppose. It seems to me that only at a comparatively recent date a separate place was assigned to the executioner's weapon among other swords. In decapitation, as in deadly combat, the most effective weapons readiest at hand were earliest pressed into use. Differentiations, to use a zoological term, in the direction of specific varieties, came slowly but surely with growing civilisation, or rather, perhaps, with the growth of artificial refinement. Arranging swords in two groups, namely, (*a*) weapons of war, and (*b*) symbolical weapons, we have the fighting swords of all times and nations—a countless variety, which, however, may be reduced to a few types—and those associated with occasions of state, as the sword of authority, of mercy, or of justice, under which last the executioner's has a place—symbolically as a terror to evil doers, and literally as the instrument of law.

For a good many years past several Bohemian students have come to Scotland to prosecute the study of theology. One of these, Mr Molinar, when passing along Hanover Street in the end of November last, turned aside to look at a collection of arms and armour about to be sold by auction at Mr Chapman's. The articles were part of the late Sir Samuel Meyrick's well-known collection. Under No. 160 of the catalogue was this entry—"Executioner's Sword with broad blade, *dated* 1621." The year, famous in the annals of the Hussite Church of Bohemia, caught Mr Molinar's eye, and he was greatly surprised and interested to find, in such circumstances, the weapon which he believed had been used at one of the most critical periods in the history of his church to give the death-stroke to some of Bohemia's noblest martyrs. Clubbing with his fellow-students, he purchased the sword for £9, on Saturday 1st December.

Fellows of the Society who have given much attention to swords, may be acquainted with many examples of this kind. The earliest notice I have found of a sword set definitely apart for the single purpose of decapitation occurs at p. 580 of M. Auguste Demmin's interesting and carefully-prepared work on "Arms and Armour," which has recently been translated by Mr Black of the South Kensington Museum. The sword figured by M. Demmin belongs to the collection in the museum of Sigmaringen, where it is labelled "Executioner's Sword of the Free Judges." This may approximately indicate its age. The allusion here is to the noted *Fehmgerichte*, or self-elected secret criminal tribunals which sprung into being first in Westphalia in connection with the widespread lawlessness which set in shortly after the death of Charlemagne (A.D. 814). In all but the shape of the guard and the ornamentation on the blade, this weapon bears a strong likeness to that now before us. The guard of the *Fehmgericht schwert* is horizontal, the bar comparatively thick and abruptly enlarged at each end; that of the Bohemian weapon bends slightly towards the blade, and broadens very gradually towards the end. The ornamentation on the blade of the Sigmaringen specimen consists of three ovals, near the hilt, in the line of length. The centre oval incloses a Greek cross *cresceted*, one crescent being at each point. Each of the other two contains the letter S, read as *Sacrificium Sanctum*. The crosses on the Bohemian specimen are small, and occur on the leather which covers the "tang," and forms the handle. They are three in number, and seem to me cresceted on one point only, the other three points having annulets or balls. Demmin figures another executioner's sword, from the Museum of Munich, whose blade has a gallows engraved on it, with the date 1407, and whose handle resembles that of the *lansquenet*, or German foot soldier's sword of the sixteenth century. On one side the blade of the Bohemian weapon is flat, the other side has a gently convex ridge passing down the centre to near the point. There is a mark on the flat side having somewhat the appearance of an old German U. This may be the maker's stamp. On the raised side the inscription is as follows:—

1621.

Andreas Schilk.

Wenzel Budowetz.

Christoph Harrant.
 Kaspar Kaplirz.
 Fridrich Bile.
 Heinrich Otto Loos.
 Wilhelm Koneczchlumsky.
 Dionis Czernin.
 Bohuslaw Michalowitz.
 Leander Ra(!)ppel.
 Georg Hauenschild.
 Valentin Kochan.
 Tobias Steffek.
 Christoph Kober.
 Johann Schultis.
 Wenzel Wastierowsky.
 Maximilian Hosstialek.
 Heinrich Kozel.
 Andreas Koczaur.
 Georg Rzepitzky.
 Michael Wittmann.
 Simon Wokacz.
 Johann Gessenius.
 Johann Kutnauer.

I have identified twelve out of the twenty-four names as those of distinguished Bohemians who suffered martyrdom in 1621. The following sentence in Czech is stamped in gilt letters on the leather handle, and has been translated by one of three Bohemian students who attended my class in the New College last session,—*Posledn nessastud práce byla dne 21 cervna 1621*, that is, "The last sad work was on 21st June, 1621." The initials, C. M., in the oval on the handle, are those of *C. Mydlar*, the executioner.

The sad work here referred to has been described in full detail by Protestant historians, and the dying testimony of some of the brave men whose names are on the blade has been carefully handed down. In 1619 Bohemia, believing that plans were being laid for the complete extirpation of the Hussite faith, elected, in the exercise of what was held to

be the nation's right, a Protestant prince to be their king. This was Frederick the Elector Palatine, husband of the Princess Elizabeth, daughter of our James VI. The emperor refused to recognise the legality of the election, and war ensued. Frederick was defeated in a battle fought on the White Mountain near Prague, and lost both his own dominions and the realm over which he had recently been placed. Many who had sided prominently with him, and had distinguished themselves by devotion to religion and liberty, were arrested in one night and at one hour; twenty-seven of them were beheaded on the 21st of June 1621. Others, along with the great body of the pastors, were driven into exile. Comenius, a contemporary Bohemian historian, referring to the times, some of the darkest features of whose story the bright blade now before us recalls, says: "Nam obtentâ anno 1620 victoria, Procerumque primariis partim supplicio affectis, partim dispersis, Ecclesiarum Pastores universos universali mandato (quasi rebellionis authores) proscripserunt, tum Populum ad religionem mutandam primum blande allicere, mox terroribus et divexationibus variis adigere, tentarunt."—"Comenii Parænesis," p. 59, 1660.

The scabbard of this weapon was afterwards purchased from Mr Pratt. On the plate surrounding the mouth is a crest—*lion rampant, crowned, dexter paw extended, double queued*—and on each side of the crest a laurel branch.

With Mr Molinar and others, I have assumed this weapon to have been the actual instrument of death. But its comparative lightness might suggest a doubt on this point. Possibly it may have been a representative of the weapon, formed for display on State occasions—a warning to all that "The Power" does not "bear the sword in vain." This, however, does not detract much, if anything, from its interest. In either case it brings very vividly before us the period of Bohemian history referred to above.