

Hungarian Scholars

*Abstract of Lecture delivered to the Royal Asiatic Society, on
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THE studies to which the lecturer referred were those in connexion with Chinese Turkestan and Tibet. The Hungarian scholars he spoke of were Csoma de Körös, Ujfalvy, Arminius Vambery, and Sir Aurel Stein. He pointed out that after the unveiling to Europe of the ancient culture of India by English scholars at the end of the eighteenth century there remained two great secrets to be revealed, (1) that of Tibet and (2) that of Central Asia. It was mainly to the remarkable self-sacrifice and devotion of the lonely Hungarian traveller, Csoma de Körös, that we owed the first interpretation of the Tibetan language and the first description of her vast Buddhist literature. On 1st January, 1820, Csoma set out from Bucharest, and travelling by ship or on foot without equipment or money reached Lahore on 11th March, 1822. From Lahore he retraced his steps to Leh, and there he began quite by accident his study of the Tibetan Language, as a result of the perusal of Georgii's *Alphabetum Tibetanum*, which had been lent him by an Englishman. This book, which gave a quite erroneous account of Tibetan, so whetted Csoma's curiosity that he determined to "be acquainted with the structure of that curious tongue". He thus spent the next nine years at various places on the N.W. frontier studying with Lamas, and in 1831 arrived in Calcutta with a complete knowledge of the language and a mass of linguistic material. From 1831 to 1835 he resided in the premises of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, devoting himself to cataloguing the Tibetan books sent from Nepal by Brian Hodgson, and preparing his Tibetan Dictionary and Grammar for the Press, for which the Government had agreed to defray the cost of publication. He lived on the merest pittance like a hermit, and never went outside the

Society's premises, his only exercise being a walk within its compound.

In 1835 he again set out on his travels, and passed two years in Eastern Bengal learning Bengali and perfecting his knowledge of Sanskrit. From 1837 to 1842 he a second time resided in the A.S.B. building, where in addition to his duties as Librarian he wrote and published a number of articles in the *Journal*. In February, 1842, at the age of 58, he set out for Darjeeling intending to make the journey to Lhasa. He reached Darjeeling sick with fever on 6th April, and six days later died. He was buried in Darjeeling and over his grave the A.S.B. raised an inscribed pillar, which was renovated in 1910.

The lecturer next referred to Ujfalvy, who travelled extensively in Central Asia and elsewhere. His main contribution to ethnography was his *Ariens au Nord et au Sud de l'Hindou Kouch*.

Arminius Vambery, whose name, thanks to the popularity of his books of travel and his frequent contributions to the *Times*, was better known to Englishmen than that of Csoma de Körös, made extensive journeys in Russian Turkestan and Persia and did much by his writings to popularize the manners and customs of the peoples he visited.

Finally the lecturer spoke of the most eminent services to science rendered by Sir Aurel Stein, who belongs to that small group of explorers in Chinese Turkestan who by their patient endurance of innumerable hardships and the application of their scholarly equipment have wrested from the sand-buried ruins of the desert the secrets of lost civilizations, and whose journeys have resulted in the revolutionizing of our conceptions of Asiatic history, and have placed the world under a permanent obligation. Seldom has there been seen combined in one individual such qualifications for exploration; we may perhaps be allowed to call Stein an *Urbmensch*—scholar, historian, geographer, and athlete all in one, this great Hungarian, a naturalized Englishman, is the pride of two nations.