

# COMPLAINTS OF UNITARIANS IN TRANSYLVANIA

by

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None of the Churches in Transylvania is being so ruthlessly treated by the Rumanian State as the Unitarian Church. In the south-eastern corner of Transylvania, which was detached from Hungary and given to Rumania by the peace treaties, this denomination has been for centuries the most easterly outpost of a branch of the Reformed Church which exists nowhere else but in the Anglo-Saxon world.

The reason for this ruthless treatment is simply that the adherents of this denomination are all Hungarians.

To begin with, the Rumanian State did its best to deprive the Unitarian Church of its material resources. Under the Land reform measures, 11,389 cadastral yokes (1 cadastral yoke = about 1½ English acres) of Unitarian Church property was confiscated. This land had been bequeathed to the Church by generous members thereof for cultural and charitable purposes. The value of the bonds given in exchange by the State was only 0.03% of the actual value of the land. Moses Berde, the founder of the Church, who by legendary thrift and self-sacrifice amassed a considerable fortune, left his extensive estate to the Unitarian Church with instructions that the income thereof was to be used to provide poor grammar-school children with a small loaf of bread three times a day. This was called "Berde Loaf". The estate has been expropriated and the bread taken out of our children's mouths. This is only one case to illustrate the situation.

Our Bishop was debarred from the Senate, although in terms of the principle of *de jure* and *de facto* equality laid down in the Paris Minority Treaty, he ought to have had the same place there as the bishops of other Churches. Article 76 of the Administration Act promulgated on August 3rd 1929 grants the Rumanian churches the right to representation on the town and municipal councils, but denies our churches that right. According to § 2 of Article 198 of the same Act all the Rumanian rural deans living in the county are entitled to sit on the county council. The same Act denies that right to our rural deans.

A striking distinction is made between the

different denominations in the grants paid out of the tax revenue. The Religion Act of 1928 makes the Greek Oriental faith the State religion, proclaims the Greek Catholic Church a primary religion and takes no account of the minority denominations. While, for instance, the Rumanian Orthodox, or Greek Catholic parish priest receives a monthly grant of 3,150 lei from the State, the Unitarian minister of the same village, a man of the same age, receives only 1250 lei. Until quite recently the difference had been more striking still. *It was only thanks to the intervention of the Unitarians in America that things improved to this extent.* Thanks to the same intervention a slight improvement is also noticeable in the lot of the clergy belonging to the other Hungarian — Reformed Church and Roman Catholic — denominations also previously treated unfairly by the Rumanian Government.

Various methods are employed to force the adherents of the Unitarian Church to become members of the Greek Orthodox Church. People them are told that they may keep their jobs, or that work will be found for them, if they adopt the Greek Orthodox faith. Misery and want induce a few to yield to the temptation. But after they have done so, it often happens that the promises are not kept, for the Act, in any case, does not admit of their returning to their old faith once more.

State schools force the children of Unitarian Hungarian families to attend Greek Orthodox services and take part in ceremonies contrary to their belief. Those refusing to comply are thrashed. The activity of Church societies is greatly curtailed. To hold a gathering or a general meeting, a permit from the authorities is required. Ignorant and high-handed gendarmes often paralyse the social side of Church life in a whole district.



Some years previous to the War our Church came to an agreement with the Hungarian State in terms of which the Church surrendered to the State the right of maintaining elementary schools in

several villages of Széklerland. Retaining its title, as registered in the Land Office, to the buildings, the Church handed over the school-houses to be used as State schools, with the stipulation that only Hungarian might be the medium of instruction. Furthermore, the State bound itself to appoint (by recommendation of the Church authorities) at least one Unitarian teacher in each school who would be able to fulfil the duties of precentor in the Unitarian parish in question. When Transylvania changed hands, the Rumanian Government claimed to be the legal successor of the Hungarian Government. But the Rumanian Government claimed rights only, and refused to undertake obligations. The Government took possession of the school-buildings, but would not hear of fulfilling the stipulation on which the Unitarian Church had handed them over to the Hungarian Government. Rumanian became the language of instruction in those schools. The Government sent Rumanian teachers from Old Rumania to purely Hungarian villages in Széklerland and these teachers could not speak a single word of the pupils' mother-tongue. The tiny elementary school pupils, again, could not understand their teachers. Teachers and pupils could not speak to one other. Under these circumstances it is but natural that the children leave school and play the truant, for which their parents are severely fined by the authorities.

Article 11 of the Paris Minority Treaty guarantees the Széklers religious and cultural autonomy under the protection of the League of Nations. In defiance of this provision the Rumanian Government has declared the part of Széklerland where the Unitarians live to be a "cultural zone". This, in plain language, means that teachers knowing no word of Hungarian are being sent there to root out that language and Hungarian civilization. They are rewarded for their labour with a 50% increase of their salaries and 10 yokes per head of land confiscated from the Hungarian landowners.

Our Church has attempted to do something against all this, but in vain. *At the cost of enormous financial sacrifices it has tried to establish Hungarian denominational schools in the endangered places. The Government, however, has refused to allow this; indeed, in many instances it has gradually withdrawn the licences of many of our existing schools and has closed several others on various flimsy pretexts.* Not long ago, for instance, it happened that on the school inspector's representations that the school-building did not come up to the prescribed standard, the Government withdrew the licence of the Székelykeresztur elementary school. The parish decided to make every effort to build a new one. The plans were laid before the school-inspector, and he was asked whether he would restore the licence if the parish erected a new school according to the plans submitted. The inspector declared himself completely satisfied with the plans, and the new school was built. In spite of this, however, and although he was repeatedly urged to restore the licence, he would not, and finally on a new and flimsy pretext refused the petition outright.

To give an idea of the situation, let it be said that there were 1,529 Hungarian State schools in Transylvania in 1918, whereas today there is not a single one. In 1918 there were 1,047 denominational schools there in which the language of instruction was Hungarian. By 1932 their number had sunk to 832. Since then several have been arbitrarily closed by the Rumanian Government. In the school-year 1932—33 only 76,000 of the 216,000 Hungarian children of schooling age were able to attend schools in which the language of instruction was their own mother-tongue. In other words, more than two-thirds of the Hungarian school children could not receive their schooling in their own language. Since then matters have grown even worse. The few denominational schools left to us do not receive any of the 14% school-rates so ruthlessly exacted from our congregations. That benefit is reserved for Rumanian denominational schools — for the schools of the Rumanians who are not nearly so hardly pressed to pay their school-rates as our people are. The Rumanian Government has ordered the erection of Rumanian State schools in many purely Székler villages, and has levied the sums required for that purpose from the members of our congregations in those places. Anybody who dares to complain is arrested by the authorities on the charge of agitating against the State.

It has been decided to build Greek Orthodox and Greek Catholic churches in villages and towns where the only Rumanian elements are the gendarmes and a few officials. The members of our Church have been ordered out by the authorities for public labour and they are being forced to build churches for the Rumanians. Those who refuse are prosecuted by the authorities.

The Unitarians thus exploited by the authorities are incapable, try as they will, of fulfilling their obligations towards their own schools and churches. They are being forced to build churches and schools for the Rumanians, and meanwhile the walls of their own churches are crumbling and their schools are being closed by the authorities as too tumbledown for use. At the consecration of the Rumanian church in Okland (County of Udvarhely) M. Constantinescu, Minister of Education, amongst other things said: — "The problem of how to Rumanianize the Széklers has reached the stage of solution". This was said in a large village 99% of the inhabitants of which are Unitarian Széklers.

Even the text of our ancient Psalms has been censored, and in many cases they were not allowed to be printed in our new Hymn-book until they had been purged of their real meaning. Innumerable Hungarian children have no chance of learning to read and write in their mother-tongue. When they reach the age of confirmation they cannot read their Hungarian catechisms. With a view to overcoming this difficulty the Minerva Literary Co. Ltd. published an A. B. C. reader for Hungarian children, to enable their parents to teach them the elements of Hungarian reading and writing at home. The book was passed by the censor, as it contained nothing but reading matter

from school-books allowed by the Government. For a few days no hindrances were put in the way of its circulation. But at the beginning of 1936 the gendarmes confiscated the book wherever they found a copy, and brought a criminal charge against all clergymen and denominational school-masters who had been circulating it. Later on the police authorities (Siguranca) ordered the confiscation of the book.

In the few denominational schools maintained with great difficulty by the Unitarians the use of Hungarian is restricted within strictly narrow limits. The Hungarian Unitarian teachers must teach Rumanian literature, history, geography, and the principles of constitutional law in Rumanian to pupils whose mother-tongue is Hungarian. Hungarian may not even be used as an auxiliary language. At school festivals and concerts no speeches may be delivered except in Rumanian and the rest of the programme must be at least 50% Rumanian. Grammar-school leaving certificate matriculation examinations must be passed before a State committee of strangers. It is the usual custom to plough 70% or 80% of the candidates.

Extremely offensive to our Church is the Minister of Public Education's Ordinance No. 125.931 in 1934, in terms of which the school-inspectors have ordered that *religious instruction in the schools must be given in the presence of Rumanian controlling officials, and only in the Rumanian language, so that they may be able to understand what is said.* Teachers of religion must have a permit which only the Ministry can grant, but the Ministry refuses to pay them. *Only Rumanian teachers of religion receive payment from the Government.*

The press of all the world over has commented on the unscrupulous injustice known as "name-analysis". Hungarian children whose ancestors have all been Hungarians have been arbitrarily registered as Rumanians in spite of their parents' protests, merely because their surnames happen to sound foreign. On this pretext they have been forbidden to attend their own Hungarian denominational schools. *Parents protest in vain against their children being pronounced Greek Orthodox and forced to attend Rumanian State schools.* It happened that a relative of a former State Secretary in the Hungarian Ministry of Public Education, who bore the same old noble Hungarian name as the State Secretary, was ordered out of the Hungarian denominational school and forced to attend the Rumanian school on the pretext that he was of the Greek Orthodox faith and a Rumanian.

The falsification of the register of births is an everyday occurrence. In spite of their parents' protests many Hungarian babies are registered as belonging to the Greek Orthodox or Greek Catholic Church. In many of the registers the word Unitarian is written in an abbreviated form: Unit. In such cases it is declared to mean "unitus", i. e. uniate, and the person in question is then declared to be Greek Catholic, a member of the Uniate Church, and therefore not Hungarian, but Rumanian.

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We must also touch briefly on the fact that the adherents of the Unitarian Church in Transylvanian are being subjected to persecution not only as Unitarians, but also as Hungarians, that being indirectly very detrimental to the Church. In what follows we publish a few data, merely to illustrate the heavy financial losses sustained under Rumanian rule by the Hungarian Unitarians in Transylvania.

Immediately after Rumania gained possession of Transylvania the Government drove thousands of Unitarians out of the country, families and all. With this our parishes in the towns lost the intelligentsia who had previously played a leading rôle in Church matters. Such Unitarian public employees as the Government could not immediately replace with Rumanian officials — in particular postal and railway employees — were allowed to retain their posts. But as soon it was considered possible to replace them with Rumanians, they were dismissed, very often without any pensions. To justify their dismissal a system of language tests was introduced, with the natural explanation that no one could be a public servant who did not speak the language of the State. But thousands of cases go to prove that this was merely an excuse. Hungarian officials who spoke Rumanian perfectly were ploughed at the examinations. For instance, in Székelyudvarhely, a purely Hungarian town, the municipal employees were ordered to take an examination in the August of 1935. The board of examiners issued a certificate to the effect that all had passed in every subject. Thereupon another committee ordered them to pass another examination, at which those who had been certified as proficient in Rumanian were ploughed and later on dismissed from their posts without pensions. There were cases where the Supreme Courts overruled this sentence, and gave a final decision that their dismissal was contrary to the law, and that their posts were to be restored to them. The decision of the Supreme Courts, however, has not yet been executed.

As things stand, in a town like Marosvásárhely, which even today is 90% Hungarian, a Unitarian, simply because he is a Hungarian, cannot hope for the job even of a crossing-sweeper. And it is the same throughout the whole of Transylvania. Recently a Law passed, as it was said, to protect national labour, which Law stipulated that 80% of the officials and workmen employed by all the industrial and commercial enterprises through the length and breadth of the country — even those established by Hungarians — must be people whose mother-tongue is Rumanian. This impossible stipulation applies even to the humble waiters in the Hungarian restaurants of purely Hungarian towns.

The Unitarian peasants have been brought to beggary with heavy taxes. Transylvania, where the minorities live, with its 4 million inhabitants bears the same burden of taxation as all the rest of Rumania with its 14 millions. While the people in the Rumanian parts of the country are made to pay only 15% of the taxes imposed, 90% is levied from the Unitarians in Széklerland. The

Unitarian landowners have been ruined by the Land Reform. 2,118,570 cadastral yokes of land have been taken from the Hungarian proprietors, for the most part without their receiving any equivalent value for it.

With these measures and others like them Rumania has brought the Hungarians in Transylvania to poverty, with a view to being able to more easily break their racial resistance. The impoverishment and destitution of our Unitarian adherents has been felt keenly by the Church. The dispoiled Unitarians cannot possibly lend financial support to the Church and its cultural institutions.

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About the middle of September, 1935, the Rev Alfred Hall, Unitarian clergyman and President of the Unitarian World Alliance, arrived at Bőllön (County of Háromszék) to visit his brethren there and their minister, who had been at Oxford University with him. The Unitarian inhabitants of the place, to show their brotherly love, decorated his car in the manse garden with flowers, among which there were also red and white ones and green leaves (red, white and green are the Hungarian colours). Immediately the Rumanian gendarmes appeared and ordered the flowers to be removed. Then, armed, they followed Mr. Hall into the church and asked for his papers.

Since the change of State foreign Unitarian brethren of ours have visited Transylvania more than once, and have reported what they saw and heard there to those who sent them, especially in England and America. Without being asked by any one of the Hungarian Unitarians to do so, and moved only by a love of justice, they have drawn the attention of foreign opinion to the miserable lot of the Hungarian denominations in Transylvania. To this the Rumanian authorities have always retorted with an assault on the Unitarian Church and its members. Many of the people who had intercourse with our foreign brethren were arrested and persecuted after the strangers had left.

The Bill of the new Rumanian Criminal Codex classifies as a criminal act the uttering of any statement that may throw an unfavorable light on the state of affairs in Rumania, even if in substance the statement is entirely in keeping with the truth.

It would be easy to enumerate *ad infinitum* the grave injustices with which the Rumanian Government, flouting the human rights guaranteed in the international treaties, creates a situation in Transylvania at once impossible and intolerable. If the Rumanian Government continues to pursue its present policy, and if the Great Powers do not make haste to enforce the minority rights guaranteed by themselves, an ancient outpost of western civilization will fall in ruins with the decay of the Unitarian Church in Transylvania.

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## NATIONALITY CONDITIONS IN RUMANIA

by

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Present-day Rumania has an area of 295,049 sq. kilometres and — according to the data of the 1930 Census — a population of 18,052,896. The country comprises nine historical provinces differing from one another very materially in respect of geographical position, history and the ethnical composition of their respective populations.

### I.

Geographically speaking, the orographic and hydrographic conditions are of decisive importance. The centre of the country is traversed by the high, wooded and uninhabited chains of the Carpathians running in a semi-circle, which completely separate Transylvania, which belongs to the Danube Basin system, and the former Hungarian Banat from the great Lowlands of Eastern Europe, from the table-land of Podolia and from the low-lying regions of the Lower Danube, which latter are not so much Balkan as East European steppe-regions in respect of their natural conditions. The crest of the Carpathians running in parallel curves at heights ranging from 1500 to 2500 metres a very decided dividing line in respect alike of natural

conditions and of economic and anthropological peculiarities and has at all times proved an efficient and stable political frontier. During the seventeen years of her conversion into a big Power Rumania has also failed utterly to put an end to the peculiar legal, administrative and economic systems characterising the several historical provinces; the result being that even today there are 5—6 different systems of law in force in Rumania the arbitrary unification of which could never be effected without great difficulties and enormous losses.

A peculiar point about the hydrography of Rumania is that the rivers radiate from the centre towards the periphery — a phenomenon which would only be a favourable one if the political, economic and population density nucleus were in the centre of the country too. However, seeing that the political centre (Bucharest) is situated at a point in the periphery, while the economic staples are scattered all over the territory of the country and happen to be entirely absent from centre and the population density nucleuses are also on the periphery, the centrifugal course of the rivers acts as a separating force upsetting the balance of a