



WHAT THE RUMANIANS HAVE DONE FOR THE MAGYARS

BY

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Transylvania's cultural life, which for centuries had shown such splendid development, was ruined when the Edict of Trianon wrested that territory from Hungary and attached it to Rumania, a country on a much lower level of civilization. The cultural programme of Greater Rumania's successive Governments was to reduce everything to one level, and everything possible was done to lower the cultural standard of Transylvania to that of Rumania proper. The Gyulafehérvár assembly, at which the Rumanians of Transylvania announced their union with Rumania, demanded full national liberty for all the peoples of that country, equal rights and full religious liberty for every denomination, and democratic measures in every sphere of public life, — e. g. universal, uniform suffrage, also for women, with direct and secret ballot, liberty of the Press, the right to assemble and to form associations, and the free propagation of all human ideas. Besides this, a minority treaty guaranteed the rights of the minorities attached to Rumania. But the Rumanian Governments simply ignored both the Gyulafehérvár resolution and the Minority Treaty, so that twenty years of Rumanian rule has resulted in the total ruin of the cultural and religious life of the non-Rumanian nationalities in Transylvania.

The Rumanian Constitution promulgated in 1923 contains the following provisions re the liberty of religious practice.

"§ 22. Liberty of conscience is absolute.

"The State guarantees all religious denominations equal liberty and protection in so far as their practices do not

constitute an offence against public order and morality and the Constitution of the State.

"The Greek Oriental (Orthodox) and Greek Catholic Churches are Rumanian Churches.

"The Greek Oriental Church being the religion of the great majority of the Rumanian people, it shall be the ruling Church in the Rumanian State. The Greek Catholic Church shall have precedence over the rest of the denominations."

This article contradicts itself when on the one hand it promises equal liberty and State protection to all religious denominations, and on the other makes an important distinction between denomination and denomination, placing the Orthodox Church in a dominant position and investing the Greek Catholic Church, as second in rank, with the right of precedence over all the rest of the denominations.

From the point of view of public law, therefore, the Rumanian Constitution creates a certain hierarchy among the churches at the head of which, and high above all the rest, stands the Orthodox Church as the established State Church; immediately below it follows the Rumanian Greek Catholic Church, whose most important privilege is that all its bishops are members ex officio of the legislative body; the rest of the denominations do not enjoy the same privileges as the Rumanian Churches, and are therefore in law in a much inferior position. Membership of the Senate is not ensured by virtue of office to every Catholic and Protestant bishop as it is to the Greek Catholic and Greek Oriental bishops, and as it was to all bishops without exception in pre-war Hungary.

In their intolerance the Rumanian Government and the Greek Oriental Church went so far as to commit wrongs against the Greek Catholic Church. The confiscation of Greek Catholic churches and their conveyance to the Greek Oriental Church was the order of the day, sometimes through the instrumentality of the administrative authorities, sometimes simply by means of frankly arbitrary action on the part of the Greek Orthodox clergy. In Pojana (County Hunyad) the Orthodox priest, with the help of his congregation, drove away the Greek Catholic priest and destroyed

the Greek Catholic church. The Greek Catholic church of the Ruthenes of Sucava was taken from the Greek Catholics by a Cabinet Council decree and handed over to the Rumanian Greek Oriental Church. Because of this Russu, the Greek Catholic bishop of Máramaros, put a question in the Senate on 30th January 1937, but he was cried down and accused of Russian irredentism. If the Greek Catholics were treated like this, it is not difficult to imagine what happened to the rest of the religious denominations.

The Religion Act of 1928 contains provisions directed against the non-Rumanian Churches that reduce these old free Churches to the level of tolerated sects. That Act empowers the State to interfere with the administration and the economic and spiritual affairs of the several denominations, to make difficulties and even — as the Preamble to the Act boasts — to forbid them to accept gifts from their brethren in foreign lands, to restrict the generosity of their members, quash the judgments passed by the ecclesiastical courts, render doubtful their exclusive right to teach religion in the schools, and undermine their authority in respect of the question of Church taxes.

On 10th May 1927 the Rumanian Church concluded a Concordat with the Papal See. This agreement proved the source of a fresh series of disabilities for the Roman Catholic Church of Transylvania. It did away with the bishopric of Nagyvárad established by St. Ladislaus 800 years ago, attaching it to the diocese of Szatmár. The dioceses of Transylvania and Csanád established 900 years ago by St. Stephen, which number 350.000 and 450.000 members respectively, were placed under the Archbishopric of Bucharest, a new creation without historical traditions, alien in spirit and language, and with but some 10.000 odd members. The Concordat provides that the assets of the Roman Catholic and Greek Catholic Churches shall be administered jointly, an arrangement which the latter had refused to consider prior to the change of rule. It has also made teaching in Rumanian compulsory in the schools owned by religious orders, where from time immemorial Hungarian had been the medium of instruction.

The Protestant Churches of Transylvania found them-

selves in an equally difficult position. The autonomy of the Transylvanian Protestant Churches was the result of centuries of evolution, and no restriction had ever been placed on their activities by the Hungarian State. After the change of rule, however, Rumania — in accordance with the anti-autonomous spirit obtaining in Old Rumania — took legislative steps to hamper the work of all the Transylvanian Protestant Churches. Protestant congregations were kept under observation, even Divine Service was controlled. One of the most important functions of the Protestant as well as of the Catholic Church was to establish and maintain schools. Their efforts to perform this task, however, are always being impeded by the Rumanian authorities, so that they are unable to fulfil their mission in this respect.

The Rumanian Administration aimed at ruining the minority Churches financially in order to weaken their activities by depriving them of their funds and thus prevent their establishing minority schools. This aim was effectively achieved under the pretext of a Land Reform. Of the 290.649 yokes owned by the four Roman Catholic dioceses no fewer than 277.645 (95.5%), were expropriated. The Protestant Churches lost 36.686 yokes (45.23% of their 81.106 yokes.). Together the Roman Catholic and Protestant Churches lost 84.5% of their landed property.

But the confiscation of their estates was not the only means employed by the Rumanian Administration to make it impossible for the minority Churches to maintain denominational schools. Legislative methods were also used, despite the fact that Rumania had in Paris on 9th December 1919 signed a treaty framed to ensure the protection of minorities, § 9 of which expressly declared that the minorities were entitled to establish at their own expense charitable, religious and social institutions, schools and other educational institutes, and to administer and supervise them, with the right to use their own language and practice their own religion freely in them. In defiance of this provision Anghelescu's Ordinances Nos. 100.088 and 100.090 ex 1923 made the teaching of geography and history in Rumanian compulsory in the Magyar denominational schools.

The spirit of these Ordinances also asserts itself in the Elementary Education Act of 1924, for the instructions issued re the execution of that law provide that in the first four classes of the seven-class elementary schools, besides Rumanian, geography, history and the elements of constitutional law must be taught in Rumanian, while in the three upper classes all subjects must be taught in that language, so that in point of fact the Act makes the teaching of all the important elementary subjects in Rumanian compulsory even in the denominational schools.

An even more serious blow to minority education is the provision contained in § 7, which stipulates that all citizens of Rumanian origin who have "lost" (forgotten) their mother-tongue must send their children to Rumanian schools. This article was responsible for the notorious system of name-analysis. If the Rumanian administrative authorities decided that a child's name did not sound Hungarian, that child was not allowed to attend a Hungarian school. In practice, therefore, large numbers of pupils of Magyar origin whose parents professed to be Magyars were forced to attend the Rumanian schools against their will.

In the field of denominational education another severe blow was inflicted on the minorities by the Private Education Act of 1925, which degraded all non-State (denominational, parish, etc.) schools to the rank of private schools, made their establishment conditional on a licence from the Minister of Education and placed their activities under his control. This Act removed teachers' training colleges and universities from the category of private schools and made it impossible for anybody but the State to establish schools of that kind. In private schools only books approved by the Minister may be used for teaching, and intercourse with the authorities must take place in Rumanian. Those schools cannot issue certificates of the same validity as those of the State schools, but the Minister may give a licence to do so. In this respect the law leaves the denominational schools at the mercy of arbitrary State interference; it has reduced the use minority languages to a minimum, and in many cases has done away with it altogether. With the aid of name-analysis the Administration has driven the pupils

away from the minority schools and made the existence of the latter dependent on the caprices of the Minister and the authorities. No wonder that even Rumanians have condemned these draconian measures. Writing of the Private Education Act in the "Adverul" on 27th May 1925, a Rumanian secondary school teacher says: — "It contains provisions the like of which were unknown to the Rumanian schools in Transylvania during the old (Hungarian) régime. Some of its provisions ignore all the principles of pedagogy, and their application means mental torture for minority children. Restrictions and prohibitions are so numerous that in certain parts one gathers the impression that one is reading a set of prison rules."

The organization of the Rumanian secondary schools and their examination system underwent a series of modifications between 1925. and 1934. Of these modifications the most notorious was the Higher Certificate Act of 1925, which substituted a so-called higher certificate examination for the old leaving certificate one. This examination has to be passed, not before the teachers of the pupils' own school, but before an *ad hoc* board of examiners appointed by the Minister, and at the headquarters of the district chief inspector of secondary schools. Each board consists of seven members, six of whom are teachers recruited from the higher section of State lyceums, while the seventh is the chairman of the board. Examinations are both *viva voce* and in writing, and the answers must be given in Rumanian. The subjects are the Rumanian language and literature, Rumanian geography, history and the elements of constitutional law, in other words, the so-called national subjects. Besides these, one modern language and two other subjects may be taught in their own mother-tongue. The first year after this Act was passed 516 pupils of Rumanian nationality and 431 Magyars were examined in Transylvania by eight boards. Of the former 188 (34.4%), of the latter 316 (73%) failed. These figures clearly illustrate the purpose of the Act, which confronts Magyar minority pupils with wellnigh insuperable difficulties.

We shall not discuss the rest of its provisions here; it must suffice to say that in 1934 Anghelescu again modified

the Secondary Education Act. The instructions as to how it was to be interpreted, issued on 27th July 1934, deprived the minorities of the last vestiges of their right to use their own mother-tongues by forbidding the use of Hungarian as an auxiliary language at the higher certificate examinations.

The Rumanian Government has restricted the use of minority languages, not only in the schools, but also in public offices, public life and even in private intercourse, and this persecution extends to other nationalities besides the Magyars. Dr. Hans Otto Roth, leader of the Parliamentary Group of the Germans of Transylvania, speaking in Parliament on 29th February 1936, said: — "The Saxons of Transylvania have been here for 800 years, and never before were they restricted in the free use of their mother-tongue."

Minority university students are compelled to study in Rumanian, for immediately after the change of rule the Rumanian Administration took forcible possession of the Kolozsvár Hungarian University, and Rumania refuses to naturalize the diplomas obtained at the universities in Hungary.

Another measure contributing to root out the Hungarian language and to further Rumanianization was the establishment of a so-called "cultural zone". Ordinance No. 40.771 of 1924 established this zone, which embraces the Magyar areas along the western frontier as well as the purely Magyar counties of Csík, Háromszék and Udvarhely. In this zone school-teachers have to work harder and therefore receive bigger salaries. This Ordinance was incorporated in the Elementary Education Act as § 159 thereof. The object served by the establishment of this cultural zone is as follows. Those teachers who enjoy special privileges have posts in State schools established in minority areas where, though the pupils are Magyars, the schools are Rumanian, and it is their duty to Rumanianize the Magyar children. Seeing that a sufficient number of efficient Rumanian teachers willing to undertake the unpleasant task of Rumanization was not to be found in Transylvania, the Government decoyed to those districts teachers from other parts of Rumania. Rumanian teachers, who often do not

speak a single word of Hungarian, have been planted in purely Magyar regions. Rumanian educational circles themselves realize the absurdity of the situation. The supervisor of public education in County Marostorda stated in his report for the school-year 1924—1925 that the number of teachers in the county had risen by 50% in the course of one year, the explanation of this being that teachers from Old Rumania, if forced to accept posts in Transylvania, chose the cultural zone. "The experience of the past year" — says the report — "shows that these appointments were a great mistake. Teachers who never heard a word of Hungarian in their lives and who do not understand the customs, much less the mentality, of the people among whom they have to work, have been sent to villages where, with the exception of the parish clerk and perhaps the gendarmes, not a soul can speak Rumanian. In consequence the conscientious among them feel like fish out of water; and, struggle as they may to make themselves understood by the children, their efforts are wasted. There is nothing to be done, for the children do not understand Rumanian . . . These teachers, who, representing universal national interests, should be the leaders of every movement, are stranded in those villages."

"At the time of the Czars" — so said Policar Betianu, a Bessarabian Member of the Rumanian Parliament, — "it was the custom that teachers sent to Siberia enjoyed special privileges. But Bessarabia is not Siberia."

Neither was Széklerland until it came under Rumanian rule.

In keeping with and as a fitting complement to these arbitrary measures in the sphere of education was the vandalism with which the monuments of many of Hungary's great historical figures and the creations of many eminent Hungarian artists were destroyed. On 13th May 1919 the poet Petöfi's statue was removed from its place in Marosvásárhely. On 18th August 1920 the statue of Louis Kossuth, the great hero of Hungarian independence, in Nagyszalonta was demolished. On 1st March 1921 the Hungarian inscription was removed from the house in Kolozsvár where King Matthias was born. That same year, on 25th March, Louis

Kossuth's statue in Nagykároly was demolished; on 7th May Stephen Széchenyi's bust was removed from the well in Széchenyi Place in Kolozsvár; on 19th October the statue in Máramarossziget of a soldier of the War of Independence of '48 was destroyed. On 21st April 1923 the Town Council of Arad ordered the removal of the historical panels from the concert hall. On 7th January 1924 the Bocskai statue in Nyárádszereda was demolished. On 2nd July 1925 the monument to the thirteen martyrs of Arad was destroyed by order of the Government. On 26th September, 1936, the statues of St. Stephen and St. Ladislas standing in the walls of Szatmár Cathedral were removed and broken to pieces. These were merely the more important statues destroyed. Civilized people will be at a loss to understand the meaning of this vandalism, but the Rumanians knew what they were about. The reason for these acts of vandalism is perfectly clear. For in Transylvania every historical monument, church and statue, every stick and stone, speaks of a thousand years of Hungarian history, of Hungarian culture and Hungarian civilization. The very tombstones in the churchyards proclaim that in its social machinery, in every phase of its economic life and in the free development of its culture, Transylvania was Hungarian. We shall seek in vain for traces of Rumanian historical remains in Transylvania. None are to be found ; therefore everything that recalled the age-old Hungarian past must be destroyed — and destroyed without mercy. The Magyar theatres had to be silenced, the Magyar Press muzzled, lest the sorrows of the Magyar people should find expression through them. One thing alone the Rumanians were powerless to suppress: Hungarian literature. The only gratifying sign during the past twenty years of Magyar suffering was the great strides made by Hungarian literature in Transylvania. The "Erdélyi Helikon" and the "Szépmíves Céh", two Hungarian literary societies, owe their prosperity and the undisturbed appearance of their publications to the fact that, carefully avoiding all delicate themes and all expressions that might be construed as having a political meaning, they have confined their activities to purely literary work.

Apart from literature, there is no sphere of Hungarian

life in Transylvania with which the Rumanians have not interfered since that country came into their possession. We have seen how the minority Churches and schools were treated, and the sufferings of the Magyars have been equally bitter in the spheres of administration and jurisdiction. They have also been hampered and hindered in all their cultural and economic efforts, as well as in the exercise of their political rights. Volumes have been written by unbiassed foreign authors about their trials, and for twenty years Europe has echoed with their complaints, so that we shall not go deeper into those questions here. It does not seem necessary to do so, for a nation that lays violent hands on the religious life of the minorities placed under its rule, forces its way into their churches, prevents their using their own language, ruins their schools, destroys their monuments and deprives them of the possibilities of economic prosperity, cannot be expected to respect the rights of the minorities in other matters either. During the past twenty years Greater Rumania has not respected the rights of any of her minorities. Her persecution of them has given rise to a spirit of rebellion in the areas acquired twenty years ago, and this proves that in her present dimensions Rumania is incapable of existing for long. She has not brought culture to the areas handed over to her; on the contrary, she has destroyed the high standard of culture she found there; she has not brought them economic prosperity, but has reduced the minorities to beggary. Rumanian policy, Rumanian administration and Rumanian jurisdiction, instead of winning the minorities over to the Pan-Rumanian idea, has merely alienated them. The twenty years of Greater Rumania's history have proved that the Rumanians are no state-building race and have therefore no title to rule over a people on a higher level of civilization than themselves.