

# CAROL I OF RUMANIA (I)

BY

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In the middle of the nineteenth century "Rumania" as such was not yet in existence; in the twentieth century she played, for a short space of time, the role of a Great Power. Before 1860 there were only two insignificant Rumanian Principalities under Turkish suzerainty; in the thirties of the present century "Greater" Rumania was represented by Ambassadors in Paris and Warsaw. In 1940, after a few years of existence, the glory of Greater Rumania waned, and the Rumanian State shrank back to its former size and insignificance. The story of its rise and subsequent decadence is one of the most curious and instructive presented by these modern times. The foundations of the country's development were laid by its first king, Carol I, the honest and enlightened ruler of an unruly and backward nation. Its decline was materially hastened by Carol II, the clever but unscrupulous monarch now in exile. Ferdinand I, who reigned between these two, was a man of no consequence, a mere puppet in the hands of his omnipotent Minister, Ion Bratianu.

Carol I, the founder of the dynasty, was a German and a Hohenzollern, but he became a good Rumanian, without whose strong and wise rule Rumania could never have risen to play an important part in European history. Three momentous events marked his career as a ruler: his election and arrival in the country as Prince of the united Principalities; Rumania's participation in the Russo-Turkish war, by which she gained independence and subsequently elevation to the status of a kingdom; and finally the beginning of the first world war, when Carol I did his best to guide his country towards the adoption of an honest and straightforward policy.

In the early nineteenth century, — as we mentioned above — there were two Rumanian Principalities, Wallachia

situated on the southern slopes of the Carpathians, and Moldavia lying to the east of these mountain ranges. By the middle of the century a strong movement arose for the union of these two provinces and the creation of a united Rumanian State. In 1857 the legislatures of the two provinces, the so-called "divans", declared that they wished the Principalities to be united — while maintaining their separate autonomous administrations and legislations — under a foreign Prince elected from one of the ruling European dynasties. The conception of this plan was easier than its execution. In view of Rumania's geographical situation, on the threshold of the Balkans and in Russia's way towards Constantinople, the Rumanian question, the union and independence of the provinces, was invested with a more than internal significance; it was a European problem concerning which the Great Powers were far from seeing eye to eye; France, Russia and Prussia were in favour of the union, while England, Austria and Turkey were strongly opposed to it.

The solution arrived at by the Paris Conference of 1858 which regulated European affairs after the Crimean War, was somewhat similar to that contained in the demands of the two divans: it united the two provinces under the name of „United Principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia“, with separate administrations and legislatures and a "central commission" for the making of such laws as concerned both provinces. These were half-hearted measures, but, as a Rumanian politician, V. Boerescu, said; "they achieved a partial union on which, with tact and prudence, a full union could be built up."

After the conclusion of the Conference it became incumbent on the Principalities to choose their new Princes.

On January 5, 1859, the Moldavians elected Colonel Alexander Cuza.

Nineteen days later, on January 24, Wallachia elected the same person, thereby bringing the two provinces under one sceptre.

For three years Cuza governed the two provinces in the prescribed manner, with separate administrations and separate legislative bodies; but in January 1862 he



summoned to Bucharest a common legislative assembly, whereby the union became an accomplished fact, although the Porte, for one, refused to accept it and subsequently recognised Cuza's election in two *firmands*, one for each Principality.

This first Prince of the united Principalities did not reign long. In the night of the 22—23 February, 1866, conspirators made their way into his palace and forced him to abdicate. He offered no resistance either then or when, a few days later, he was escorted to the frontier and bidden to leave the country. The night of the 22nd—23rd February is known in Rumanian history as *noaptea nefasta*, the calamitous night.

The conspirators did not let the grass grow under their feet. Parliament assembled immediately, and elected as Cuza's successor Philip, Count of Flanders, brother of the King of the Belgians. But Napoleon III, at that time supreme arbitrator in Continental affairs, forbade the Count of Flanders to accept the election, so that it had to be dropped. The situation was delicate. The Austro-Prussian war was imminent. Russia, on her side, was carrying on a secret but active propaganda against the perpetuation of the union by the election of a common ruler. Prompt action was indispensable.

In March 1866 the family of Prince Charles Anthony Hohenzollern was assembled in Düsseldorf for the Easter holidays when a Rumanian statesman, Ion Bratianu, arrived unexpectedly and offered the Rumanian crown to the Prince's second son, Prince Charles. The latter was inclined to accept the offer, but his acceptance was naturally contingent on the consent of the head of the Hohenzollern family, the King of Prussia; and he hesitated to give it.

Hitherto, he argued, Prussia had viewed Balkan affairs as a neutral, having no interest or concern in them; but if a Hohenzollern became ruler of Rumania, a moral link would be established which might entail unwelcome political consequences for Prussia. Moreover, continued the King in the letter he wrote on the subject to Prince Charles Anthony, „the ruler of Rumania would be a vassal of Turkey; would that be an enviable or honourable position for a Hohen-

zollern? One might hope for an alteration in this situation, but only in the distant future and after serious political convulsions. Is not, "asked the king", the present situation of your son, and the future before him, much more advantageous and enviable?" Prince Charles was at this time a Captain in the Dragoon Guards.

Events took a different course from that desired by the king.

On April 14 the Berlin evening papers unexpectedly published a telegram from Bucharest to the effect that the provisional government had proclaimed Prince Charles' candidature to the Rumanian throne and submitted the matter to a popular vote; when, a few days later, the plebiscite was held, 685,960 votes were cast in favour of the candidature and only 224 against it.

The King of Prussia still wavered, fearing the opposition of France and Russia. But at this point Bismarck entered on the scene and promptly solved the question. Inviting the young Prince to come and see him, he said to him:

"A whole nation has unanimously elected you its Prince. Follow the call, go straight to the country, and you will gain the confidence of the entire population."

The Prince objected that the preliminary permission of the king was necessary.

"It is not", said Bismarck. "Apply for leave to go abroad — the King has fine instincts, he will understand. You will relieve him of all responsibility, and he will be grateful for it."

Bismarck's advice to the Prince was to visit Napoleon III and to obtain his consent.

As regarded the other Powers — "Russia and the Porte will protest against your election; France, England and Italy will be on your side, while Austria will do all she can to upset your candidature. But there is not much to fear from that quarter, as I think of keeping Austria busy for some time to come." He was alluding to the impending war between Austria and Prussia. Prussia's position was the most difficult. "As a result of her political and geographic situation", said Bismarck, "Prussia has kept consistently aloof from oriental questions, only making her voice heard

at Conferences. In this case I, as Prussian Prime Minister, would be obliged to oppose your candidature, as I do not wish to break with Russia at the present moment. By acting on your own account you will save the King from an awkward situation, and I am certain that he would not be ill-disposed, though he could not give his consent as head of the family. If Your Highness is once in Rumania, the question will soon be solved, for if Europe sees itself faced with a *fait-accomplí*, the Powers will protest, but a protest remains on paper and the facts won't be altered."

To the objection of the Prince that Russia might employ coercive measures, he replied:

"The application of coercive measures might have the most fatal consequences for Russia herself."

He advised the Prince to write a letter to the Tsar telling him that he, Prince Charles, regarded him as his mightiest protector and that he hoped to solve the Balkan problem with the help of Russia. A Russian marriage would also be of advantage.

"A *fait accompli* will be the most fortunate and the most honourable solution of the question", were the concluding words of Bismarck's homily.

After leaving the Prime Minister, Prince Charles had an audience with the king, who received him with the utmost cordiality, while telling him that he could not share Bismarck's opinions or overlook the difficulties which lay in his way, the most serious of which, he repeated, would be the submission of a Hohenzollern to the suzerainty of the Sultan.

The Prince assured him that this would be merely a temporary matter and that he would achieve his own and his country's independence as soon as feasible, by armed force if necessary. He begged the king to believe that he would never forget the honour of his name.

The king gave him leave of absence from his regiment, embraced him, and dismissed him with the words: "God be with you."

The greatest difficulty had been removed from Prince Charles' path. Nevertheless some feverish days were in store for him: the final decision had yet to be taken.

There was not much diplomatic activity in connection with the question of the Rumanian throne. The Conference of Paris simply ignored the election and expressed the desire that a Rumanian should be elected to fill the throns.

The Paris decision impressed neither the Prince nor the Rumanians, and gradually King Wilhelm also gave up his rigid official standpoint. When, on the 3rd of May, Prince Anthony, Prince Charles' father, visited him, he declared that he had no wish to influence Prince Charles in his resolve, and would accept a *fait accompli*. Bismarck's standpoint had carried the day.

The Austro-Prussian war being now imminent, the Rumanian question was relegated to the background.

On May 7 Prince Charles had a long interview with the two Rumanian emissaries, Balaceanu and Bratianu, who had come to Düsseldorf from Paris, and told them that he had made up his mind to leave at once for Rumania.

There remained the difficulty of deciding by what route he was to reach that country. The sea voyage via Marseilles or Genoa, all round Italy and Greece, was too long; it would take three weeks, not to mention the fact that he might be detained by the Turks in Constantinople. The Russian route was equally impracticable, so that the only way open to him was through Austria-Hungary. This, needless to say, was the most hazardous route of the three. War between Austria and Prussia was expected to be declared at any moment, and the Prince, a Prussian cavalry officer, would, if recognised, be infallibly taken prisoner. Balaceanu, with some want of tact, even implied that he might be shot.

There was, however, no choice, and the Austro-Hungarian route was decided upon.

On May 9 orders were given for the mobilization of the Prussian army, and it looked as though Prince Charles' trip had become an impossibility. But his resolve was taken and he did not waver. The date of his departure was fixed for May 11, a Friday.

His route took him through Switzerland, and in Zürich a Swiss passport was procured for him in the name of "Karl Hettingen", his destination being given as Odessa. He travelled second class, while his two travelling companions,

Baron v. Mayenfisch and Councillor v. Werner, travelled first. From Zürich he wrote letters to the French and the Russian Emperors, disclosing his enterprise and expressing the hope that they would not "disapprove" of it. A third letter was dispatched to the Sultan, containing the assurance that he "knew his obligations towards His Majesty and would endeavour to fulfil them."

He travelled by way of Augsburg and Munich to Salzburg, the first Austrian frontier station. As he was about to enter the waiting-room, a passport official asked him rudely for his name. The Prince, in his excitement, had forgotten the name he was travelling under, but he pulled himself together and mutely held out his passport. In the waiting-room new perils awaited him, for the room was filled with mobilized Austrian officers, some of whom had been his comrades in the common Austro-Prussian campaign of 1864. He sat with a beating heart behind the screen of a large newspaper, fearing every moment to be recognised in spite of the spectacles which he had assumed as a disguise.

The train was due to leave Salzburg at 6 p. m. Before its departure a railway official entered the compartment and to the prince's excited imagination seemed to observe him with special attention. He then wrote something in his note-book, which convinced the Prince that the man's suspicions had been aroused and that he was going to send word to Vienna to have him kept under observation. This fear proved groundless, for nothing untoward happened.

In Vienna, where the train arrived next morning, the station was likewise crowded with mobilized soldiers, and here, too, Prince Charles recognised several generals with whom he had fought in the Danish campaign. He hurriedly left the station and jumped into a cab, forgetting even to tell the driver where he wanted to be driven. It was imperative for him to betake himself at once to the South Station, whence the trains leave for Hungary.

At midday the Hungarian frontier was passed and at 5 p. m. Budapest was reached. After leaving the Hungarian capital, the train crossed the Great Hungarian Plain, passed through Szeged and Temesvár, and in the morning of May 18 arrived at the terminus of the Hungarian railway line, the

frontier station Baziás. The journey was uneventful, except that all the stations were crowded with mobilized military.

From Bazias the trip should have been continued immediately by steamer down the Danube, but owing to the transport of troops the earliest available steamer was only to leave in two days.

On Sunday morning, ten days after the departure from Germany, the steamer arrived at last, and Prince Charles went on board at once. An hour later Bratianu arrived from Bucharest but ignored his future ruler for the time being.

Turnu Severin, the first station on Rumanian soil, was reached at four o'clock in the afternoon. Charles's new country lay before his eyes at last.

He hastened to leave the boat, but the Captain as he passed the bridge, who knew that his passenger had a ticket for Odessa and believed him to be labouring under a mistake, called after him to stop him. The passenger did not stop, however, and the Captain, seeing him surrounded by obsequious Rumanians, exclaimed in open-mouthed amazement: "By Heaven! That must have been the Prince of Hohenzollern!"

As the Prince landed, Bratianu, hat in hand, stepped forward to greet him on Rumanian soil, after which he drove with him to the Town Hall, where a dazed Prefect received his future ruler. It was however decided to preserve the Prince's incognito for the time being, as a Turkish army under the command of Omer Pasha was stationed in inconvenient vicinity, on the opposite bank of the Danube.

The day was spent in the little town, and it was not till the evening that the journey was continued, in a carriage drawn by eight undersized Rumanian horses; there were as yet no railways in Rumania. The trappings of the horses left much to be desired; every moment some part of the cobweb-like harness gave way, but the mad gallop of the eight small horses never slackened.

This course across the plains of Wallachia, through some of the most primitive and neglected country in Europe, must have presented all the charms of novelty to a member of a German ruling House, coming from one of the cultural centres of the Continent. Now and then halts were called



for a short rest or a meal, and everywhere the Prince was enthusiastically acclaimed. Before entering the town of Pitesti they met the 2nd infantry regiment, and Prince Charles passed it in review, subsequently remarking to Bratianu: "The joy with which the soldiers saluted me impressed me very much; but when I get the army into my own hands it must have a different aspect."

May 22 was the last day of the journey. The last night far from the capital. The Prince refused to put on a Rumanian military uniform and wore evening clothes. His carriage was now drawn by twelve horses.

In Baneasa, a suburb of Bucharest, he was received by an immense crowd and by the Mayor, Demetrius Bratianu, who presented him with the keys of the town on a velvet cushion. At that moment a shower came on, to the great delight of the masses, for rain is considered a lucky omen in Rumania. The Prince remembered that in the course of his African travels in 1861 rain fell when he visited an oasis and the Arabs had kissed his hands and feet.

His first impression of Bucharest was not favourable. The streets were so badly paved that he could hardly keep himself from falling out of his carriage; the houses were low and dirty. Seeing a one-storied house with a sentinel in front of it, he inquired of General Golescu what it was? "*C'est le palais*", answered the General. The Prince could not believe his ears. "*Ou est le palais?*" he asked, looking round him; and the General was forced to repeat that the one-storied building before them was the royal palace.

This "palace" had previously belonged to the Golescu family and, having been bought by the State, had been used alternately as a military school, a barracks, and a hospital. The rooms, though not spacious, contained some fine Parisian furniture.

Prince Charles established his quarters in the northern portion of the house, whose windows looked on to some military buildings; Prince Cuza, before him, had preferred to live on the opposite side, which looked on to a square where gypsies were wont to camp and where pigs wallowed in the deep mud. It was here that, a far months earlier, Cuza had been made to abdicate. The men who, in the night of

February 23, had made their way into the palace for this purpose, had found him in the company of his mistress, Marie Obrenovitch, while his wife slept in another wing of the building.

But if the palace was mean and shabby, the reception accorded to the new ruler was magnificent in the extreme. As he passed in state through the streets, flowers, verses and even pigeons were showered down on him from the windows and balconies.

After a solemn *Te Deum* in the Cathedral, the Prince took the oath to observe the laws of the land before a Constituent Assembly in Parliament. At that time Rumania had as yet no Constitution. Henceforth Prince Charles of Hohenzollern was Prince Carol of Rumania. He was greeted by the President of the Chamber, and answered in the following speech, delivered in French:

"Elected Prince of Rumania by the spontaneous will of the people, I have unhesitatingly left my family and my country to respond to the call of the nation which has confided its destinies to my care. From the moment when I set foot on this sacred soil, I became a Rumanian... I offer you a loyal heart, a firm resolve to make good, and a devoted allegiance to my new country. A good citizen to-day, if necessary a soldier to-morrow, I shall share your destinies in evil days as in good..."

At ten o'clock the same evening the *Kaimakamia* and government appeared at the palace and tendered their resignation. The Crown Council lasted until one o'clock in the morning, when it was announced that a new government had been formed with Lascar Catargiu at its head.

The first foundations of the new State had been laid, but the building of modern Rumania took many long years and is not even yet completed. A few days after his arrival in Bucharest, Prince Carol uttered the following words to a deputation of army officers: "*N'oubliez pas que je suis venu pour créer un avenir et non pas pour faire d'un passé que j'ignore et ne veux pas même connaître, la base de mon activité*", — "remember that I have come here to create a future and not to base my activities on a past which I ignore and with which I have no wish to become acquainted."