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THE PRIDE OF BEING A ROMANIAN*

...Soon there will be eighteen centuries since the Latin seed was planted in the Carpathian countries; however, never before has the noble seed been thrown into the whirl of such dangerous happenings as nowadays. The stories of the Roman soldiers about the riches and beauties abounding in these countries, and the desire to reach an easy welfare, gathered in these lands people from a foreign world, but people that came here with the determination to lay the foundations of a life more appropriate to the blessed nature of the place. Nevertheless, after eighteen centuries, the foundations of this life are still insecure. Blessed was the seed, blessed was the land where it grew roots, but the times have and still are terrible. Peoples after peoples have perished, whole worlds have gone ashambles while Latin life has gone on sheltered by the Carpathians. Then, when savage peoples started from the North and the East to plunder the treasures gathered in the South and the West, the Romanian people had just come into being; but when peoples indulging in victory and domination faded away from the face of the world, a young and strong people rose slowly from the Carpathians, ready to start struggle for the preservation of its identity. It is while fighting against the Hungarians, the Poles and the Tartars that the Romanian countries were founded; the fights were still on, the two countries still young, when a new wave of peoples stormed over from the East, frightening the whole West. Byzantium falls, and so does Bulgaria, Hungary, all the countries up to the Alps, but here, at the borders of Europe there remains a small people which bears but does not submit, a handful of people who, through courage and wisdom, know how to preserve the sacredness of the land under their feet. Three centuries in the life of this people are a compact row of straggles; and when, finally, the Ottoman Empire sees its power weaken and the Romanians start to hope for a peaceful development, a new invasion sweeps the country from the North, more terrible than any other before. We have had many and terrible enemies in our long existence; we had impatient enemies whom we had to fight hand-to-hand; we had enemies that had no pity for infants either; we had enemies that defeated us, but left us the pride of the vanquished man; today's enemy comes in friendship and is not after our blood, but seeks to shatter the foundations of our soul; it does not mean to defeat us, but seeks to drain us of our pride that gives us strength and unity. Ever since the Moldavian army scattered at Movila R'biei, the few brave men left sought refuge, and only the outlaws remained to let the world know that there was once a people of men here.

Now, when, after almost two whole centuries, the Romanians have taken to the arms again, the Czar's armies are crossing the country's borders, the Czar's brother is throwing in our eyes a proclamation that states he is coming as a friend, and the Romanian army is retreating. After two hundred years, a Romanian army is gathered, and its first action is a retreat. However, later on, this army fought together with the Czar's troops, and proved it was not made of men deserving the shame of a retreat. All

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the same, today, this victor army has retreated. Why has it done so? Because the Russians are stationed in this country as friends? Rather a strange friendship, though! Has it retreated because the Czar is powerful? No! Czar Alexander II does not have the power of Bayezid I, the "Lightning", not that of his ruthless descendants; the country was subdued by the Turks; but the Turkish army had no right to station on this land. Our ancestors had made a compromise with their powerful enemies; but on one condition; that the country be free of foreign troops. And if, in those times, there had been a powerful emperor to have refused this condition, the Romanians would not have thought much about how big their losses of lives and riches would have been, because only defeated could they bear a foreign boot on their lands.

But today we are taking the same path as the Poles. They had for eight years protested against the Russian occupation; but they shed no blood, because the Czar came as a friend and protected their liberties, because the Russians brought money to the country. Thus, in the long run, they lost that which consolidates a nation: the conscience of dignity, manly pride, and stubborn power. Do we have this power? If we do, we shall not take the Poles' path and we shall not ask ourselves how long we have lived, or will still live, but we shall close our eyes and listen to the voice of our nature, since, with healthy peoples, there are times when even the old are seized with the enthusiasm of their youth. But this is exactly what remains to be proved. Eighteen centuries have elapsed since the Latin seed was planted in this earth where we live; in spite of the storms it has crossed, this life goes on, growing and getting ever stronger. This life has been preserved and strengthened not because those who worked hard to consolidate its foundations were many and powerful, but because each of them was proud of his ancestors' deeds. Ever since there existed a Romanian on the face of the Earth, the Romanian has been proud to be a Romanian, and even then when the world looked down on him, he went on singing his *doina*, and, conscious of the powers inside him, he would look proudly around him.

The seed that bred this people is a noble one, and this people will only perish when the Romanians forget about the nobleness of their origins.

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