

# What the "Balkan Question" Really Is



MACEDONIAN REBEL BEAUTY.



MACEDONIAN MOUNTAIN GATE TO SECRET FASTNESSES.

**F**OR MANY years the world has talked of the Balkan question almost constantly. The annual recurrence of the rumor of "trouble in the Balkans" is so regular that it has become a subject for world-wide jest, serious and ever-threatening as it is.

And yet to almost the whole world the Balkan question is little more than a muddle of obscure geography, tangled history and still more tangled intrigue.

Briefly expressed, the Balkan question is the keystone of that tenderly poised arch, the balance of power—the Monroe doctrine of Europe.

And as the Monroe doctrine of the United States was susceptible to the meanest outbreak of insurrection in Cuba, so Europe's doctrine is shaken every time a handful of patriots or brigands raises a revolt in Turkey's Cuba of Macedonia.

At any day a horde of mountain robbers with no aim higher than to pillage a poor village, or a band of devoted liberators with the mere aim of freeing their obscure province from the Turk, may strike the spark that will blow up the whole balance of power and bury the peace of all Europe in the wreck.

As a concert, the powers are bent on keeping the keystone of the Balkans in its place. Jealousy and fear are the powerful motives that make them zealous in the endeavor.

Individually, each power is studying to see how it can assure itself of advantage enough to pay to pull it out.

The two nations most openly concerned in the Balkan question today are England and Russia. England's interest just now lies in keeping the question as it has been. Russia cannot, and will not, be content in the nature of the case till it controls the Balkans or has been so signally defeated in trying that it will not be in position to try again.

To Russia, the ownership of the Balkans would mean the ownership of an empire covering the entire eastern portion of the European continent.

That would mean the control of the Mediterranean in the east and the movement toward England's Oriental empire would be advanced by a mighty step.

To Austria the acquisition of Balkan territory would mean a free way to the Orient, and Austria is doing an immense business with the far east. Its interest is far more important than the world guesses.

To Turkey a collapse of the present condition means almost certainly that there will be no Turkey in Europe after the smoke clears away, whatever other nation is defeated or victorious.

It is written that Turkey must go out of Europe.

It is barely possible that it will go finally without war, squeezed out by the slow and fatal process of diplomatic coercion.

If it does not go peacefully, it is certain that there will be war in Europe sooner or later.

It is this that makes the Balkan question no mere academic question, but one rife with constant probabilities for mischief that may involve the whole world.

Now that the United States is a world power, with a thousand foreign interests in places where twenty years ago it had none, the Balkans may be said truly to be of vital concern to this country as well as to Europe. No man can guess at how many ends the world might catch fire in case of a general European war.

So it is to the present interest of all civilized communities that the Balkan buffer

be kept inviolate and undisturbed as long as possible.

That buffer of mountain and plain people largely by semi-savage and half-civilized tribes, is no small territory valuable merely on account of its strategic position.

It is big enough to make a formidable empire, if ever another Boris or Czar Simeon could arise to subdue the tribes and hold them together. The Balkan states—Serbia, Bulgaria, Montenegro, Albania, Macedonia and other Turkish provinces on the peninsula form a territory bigger than England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales put together; bigger than Italy or Norway; almost as large as Sweden, and three-quarters of the size of the German empire.

The states of New York, Pennsylvania, Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts and Connecticut if put together in one jumbled mass, would make a country of almost the exact size of the land of the Balkan Question.

If jumbled together hard enough, the states would make a land something like the Balkan peninsula, too, in conditions.

Throw in the Maine winters and the rocks of Vermont. Tumble the mixture down toward the sea. Throw the Pennsylvania oil wells into the middle. Stir them up, throw the Adirondack and Alleghany mountains indiscriminately into the pudding, and you would have a hint of the Balkans. The Adirondacks and the Balkans have about the same average height. The forbidding aspects of some of the Alleghany mountain scenery is duplicated in the Balkans. Throw in, furthermore, vast tracts of land denuded of lumber and blackened; throw in a smiling sea; throw in villages and towns ranging in appearance from the charm of thriving New England villages to the desolate ugliness of a Pennsylvania coal mining town; mix in the grotesque architecture of the American seashore; stir in sulphur wells, magnificent scenery, earthquakes and blood-red mud, and you have the Balkans.

There are many ways of entering the Balkan peninsula; but there are not so many of getting out. Too often one goes in by railroad and comes out by ransom, a method too expensive for any except large purses.

The most comfortable way of entering the land is by way of Hungary into Serbia. The Serbians have advanced beyond the old and simple life of throat slitting and revolution, and are building up a fine land rich with agriculture and mines. Austria-Hungary is pushing her feelers of railroad through it in all directions. Immense tunnels burrow under the mountains. All the Hungarian railroads lead toward the Balkans. Her constant stream of freight and passengers turns either into the Adriatic sea across Bosnia or through Belgrade, both by land and by Danube ports, into Serbia, Roumania and Bulgaria and so finally reaches the Black sea, the Aegean sea and the ancient highways leading to the far east.

One of the last places to be touched by the railroad before it leaves Hungary to cross into the Serbian boundary, is the Austrian Gibraltar—the mighty and ancient fortress of Peterwardein.

Then the train steams into Belgrade, a city with one of the most romantic records of history. It is a magnificent city to approach, for its site on the Danube is so beautiful that travelers give it fourth rank in point of site among the capitals of Europe—Constantinople, Lisbon, Stockholm and Belgrade.

Almost everywhere in Belgrade are monu-

ments and memorials. They are to martyrs of the Turkish wars, murdered statesmen and assassinated patriots.

Nearly every paving stone is pregnant with a bloody story that reaches almost from the time the first stone was laid to the beginning of the present generation.

The last Turkish garrison did not move out of Belgrade until 1867, and until then the entire eastern portion of the town was populated by Turks. The Turk's hand is still to be seen everywhere—in minarets and other architecture, in costumes and in manners.

On Friday, when the weekly market is held in the city, the streets are full of red fezzes. The Serbian peasants still wear the Turkish trousers gathered at the ankles. Often he wraps a towel-like mass of linen around his high fez. Often he wears a high sheepskin cap.

Every peasant wears a long, sharply pointed and keenly ground knife on his right side in a wooden scabbard.

From Belgrade the train roars through a land which only a few years ago was a land of brigands, whole villages being held as openly by them as if their occupation were the most commonplace. One particularly famous and strong home of the brigands was the village of Domuspotek (the brook of pigs).

Now the most unusual occupation of most of those villages is to boil down plums in great caldrons in the open air in the season.

If a man wishes to see all the tribes of the Balkans, he need merely continue on the train to the town of Nische.

Nische will be the great object of maneuvers if ever there is a Balkan war.

Its strong fortress commands the key to the road into Bulgaria and Macedonia. Christian churches and Turkish mosques stand there almost side by side. The cry of the imam from the minaret mingles with the bells that call the Catholic worshippers.

Armed like arsenals, with long pistols, long rifles, long knives, Macedonians, Albanians and Arnauts shuffle along with the walk of the mountaineer. Serbian peasant women in gaudily striped frocks, Bulgarian women dressed in black and looking like priests, mountaineers from Montenegro in fustanellas with long-beaked yellow and red shoes and brilliant scarlet cloaks, grave Hodschas in silken caftans and green turbans, mingle on the streets with Spanish Jewesses with brilliant gold and silver headdresses, and Montenegrin women in white skirts and sleeveless waists, and little red caps with a rising sun embroidered on their fronts in gold.

Near Nische is a square tower. Tell its story and you tell the story of the Balkans.

The tower is known as the Tschelckula, meaning "skull tower." In 1809 the Turks advanced toward Nische. The Serbian Woiwode, Stefan Sindjelitsch, entrenched himself with 3,000 Serbians in the village of Kamenitza. They were overcome. When the Janissaries rushed among them, Sindjelitsch fired the powder magazine and blew his own men and the Turks into pieces.

The Turkish army ravaged like a band of wolves and killed all Serbians who were left alive by any chance. After they had killed and burned till there was nothing left to kill and burn, they chopped the heads off the dead Serbian patriots. Then they began the erection of a great square tower. After it had risen to some height they began to alternate the rows of stones with rows of Serbian heads. Altogether

they set fifty-six rows of seventeen heads each in alternate rows of stones.

This memorial of the Tamerlanes of the nineteenth century was left untouched, with the skulls grinning out upon the land, until 1878, when the Serbians took them out reverently and buried them, with the exception of one that still looks out from the east side of the tower.

Farther on, near the Bulgarian boundary, is another strategic place that will be heard from in case of war. It is the fortress of Bela Palenka, and Moltke pronounced it one of the important points of the Balkans. It was the old Roman city of Remesiana. It is guarded still by an ancient castle-fort built in 1600 by the Grand Vizier Mustapha Pasha. He built it by the pleasant expedient of tearing down Serbian churches and using their stones for it. He also took the stones from ancient Roman ruins.

This town is close to Piost, which stands on the Bulgarian boundary and has a true Balkan history. It has been occupied at various times by Turks, Bulgarians, Serbians, Russians and Austrians. Almost every time it was taken only after bloody fighting.

From Serbia to Bulgaria is a leap into different manners, different costumes, different architecture.

The Bulgarian does not love the Serbian unduly. Luckily for the peace between them, the Bulgarians are kept so busy plotting and counter-plotting about Macedonia that their somewhat embarrassing attentions are directed almost entirely southward just now.

As the Cuban junta made its headquarters in the United States, so the Macedonian junta makes its headquarters in Bulgaria. But unlike the Cuban revolutionists, the Macedonian committee has not merely enlisted Bulgarian sympathies and aid. It has risen to a great Bulgarian political power.

It keeps the pitch hot all the time.

Dive out of Bulgaria and into the mountain districts of Macedonia and you dive into a land of Alexander the Great, of Roman generals, and of czars who were czars long before Russia had any. Time has jumped over this land and touched it only in leaps ages apart.

Go only a short distance from Salonica, ancient, storied Salonica (very dirty now and inhabited by flea-bitten Turkish soldiers who do not like life, apparently), and you will find a country marked with the tumult of the Macedonian kings, big stone piles just within sighting distance of each other, that served as the stations for the wireless telegraphy of those days.

You may find a fine old gentleman, dressed in a long skirt that falls below the knees and with pretty weapons fastened to all available protuberances. He will talk to you (if he trusts you and you are fortunately so poor that you are not worth capturing) of his system of levying tribute as unconcernedly as if he lived in the day of Ulysses, earning his living with his good sword and shield.

Turkish soldiers gaze with respect at the very brigands whom they are, technically, sworn to kill. Those brigands swagger through the villages beloved by all the women, envied and admired by all the men, afraid of nobody. Impossible though it seems, they wear even more arms than the other citizens. They strut by the Turks superciliously, mockingly.

Sometimes the Macedonian brigand sits on a rock just out of gunshot from a gar-

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