

THE BALKAN PENINSULA

AGENTS

America The Macmillan Company 64 & 66 Fifth Avenue, New York

Australasia The Oxford University Press 205 Flinders Lane,
Melbourne

Canada The Macmillan Company of Canada, Ltd. St. Martin's House,
70 Bond Street, Toronto

India Macmillan & Company, Ltd. Macmillan Building, Bombay 309
Bow Bazaar Street, Calcutta

A BALKAN PEASANT

THE BALKAN PENINSULA

BY

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ETC.**

**PUBLISHED BY A. & C. BLACK, LTD. 4, 5, & 6 SOHO SQUARE,
LONDON, W. 1915**

PREFACE

This book was written in the spring of 1914, just before Germany plunged the world into the horrors of a war which she had long prepared, taking as a pretext a Balkan incident—the political murder of an Austrian prince by an Austrian subject of Serb nationality. Germany having prepared for war was anxious for an occasion which would range Austria by her side. If Germany had gone to war at the time of the Agadir incident, she knew that Italy would desert the Triple Alliance, and she feared for Austria's loyalty. A war pretext which made Austria's desertion impossible was just the thing for her plans.

It would be impossible to reshape this book so as to bring within its range the Great War, begun in the Balkans, and in all human probability

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to be decided finally by battles in the Balkans. I let it go out to the public as impressions of the Balkans dated from the end of 1913. It may have some value to the student of contemporary Balkan events.

My impressions of the Balkan Peninsula were chiefly gathered during the period 1912-13 of the war of the Balkan allies against Turkey, and of the subsequent war among themselves. I was war correspondent for the London *Morning Post* during the war against Turkey and penetrated through the Balkan Peninsula down to the Sea of Marmora and the lines of Chatalja. In war-time peoples show their best or their worst. As they appeared during a struggle in which, at first, the highest feelings of patriotism were evoked, and afterwards the lowest feelings of greed and cruelty, the Balkan peoples left me with a steady affection for the peasants and the common folk generally; a dislike and contempt, which made few exceptions, for the politicians and priests who governed their destinies. Perhaps when they settle down to a more peaceful existence—if ever they do—the

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inhabitants of the Balkan Peninsula will come to average more their

qualities, the common people becoming less simple-minded, obedient, chaste, kind: their leaders learning wisdom rather than cunning, and getting some sense of the value of truth and also some sense of ruth to keep them from setting their countrymen at one another's throats. But at the present time the picture which I have to put before the reader, with its almost unbelievable contradictions of courage and gentleness on the one side and cowardly cruelty on the other, is a true one.

The true Balkan States are Bulgaria, Serbia, Montenegro, and Albania. Roumania is proud to consider herself a Western State rather than a semi-Eastern Balkan State, though both her position and her diplomacy link her closely with Balkan developments. Turkey, of course, cannot be considered in any sense as a Balkan State though she still holds the foot of the Balkan Peninsula. Greece has prouder aspirations than to be considered one of the struggling nationalities of the Balkans and dreams of a revival of

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the Hellenic Empire. But in considering the Balkan Peninsula it is not possible to exclude altogether the Turk, the Greek, the Roumanian. My aim will be to give a snapshot picture of the Balkan Peninsula, looking at it as a geographical entity for historical reference, and to devote more especial attention to the true Balkan States.

FRANK FOX.

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THE BALKAN PENINSULA

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CHAPTER I

THE VEXED BALKANS

The Fates were unkind to the Balkan Peninsula. Because of its position, it was forced to stand in the path of the greatest racial movements of the world, and was thus the scene of savage racial struggles, and the depository of residual shreds of nations surviving from great defeats or Pyrrhic victories and cherishing irreconcilable

mutual hatreds. As if that were not enough of ill fortune imposed by geographical position, the great Roman Empire elected to come from its seat in the Italian Peninsula to die in the Balkan Peninsula, a long drawn-out death of many agonies, of many bloody disasters and desperate retrievals. For all the centuries of which history knows a blood-mist has hung over the Balkans; and for the

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centuries before the dawn of written history one may surmise that there was the same constant struggle of warring races.

It seems fairly certain that when the Northern peoples moved down from their gloomy forests towards the Mediterranean littoral to mingle their blood with the early peoples of the Minoan civilisation and to found the Grecian and the Roman nations, the chief stream of these fierce hordes moved down by the valley of the Danube and debouched on the Balkan Peninsula. Doubtless they fought many a savage battle with the aborigines in Thessaly and Thrace. Of these battles we have no records, and no absolute certainty, indeed, that the Mediterranean shore was colonised by a race from the North, though all the facts that we are learning now from the researches of modern archaeologists point to that conclusion. But whatever the prehistoric state of the Balkan Peninsula, the first sure records from written history show it as a vexed area peopled by widely different and mutually warring races, and subject always to waves of war and invasion from the outside. The Slav historian Jireček concludes that the Balkan Peninsula was inhabited at the earliest times

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known to history by many different tribes belonging to distinct races—the Thraco-Illyrians, the Thraco-Macedonians, and the Thraco-Dacians. At the beginning of the third century, the Slavs made their first appearance and, crossing the Danube, came to settle in the great plains between the river and the Balkan Mountains. Later, they proceeded southwards and formed colonies among the Thraco-Illyrians, the Roumanians, and the Greeks. This Slav emigration went on for several centuries. In the seventh century of the Christian era a Finno-ugric tribe reached the banks of the Danube. This tribe came from the Volga, and, crossing Russia, proceeded towards ancient Moesia, where it took possession of the north-east territory of the Balkans between the Danube and the Black Sea. These were the

Bulgars or Volgars, near cousins to the Turks who were to come later. The Bulgars assumed the language of the Slavs, and some of their customs. The Serbs or Serbians, coming from the Don River district had been near neighbours of the Volgars or Bulgars (in the Slav languages "B" and "V" have a way of interchanging), and were without much doubt closely allied to them in race originally. Later, they diverged, tending more to the

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Slav type, whilst the Bulgars approached nearer to the Turk type.

There may be traced, then, in the racial history of the Balkans these race types: a Mediterranean people inhabiting the sea-coast and possessing a fairly high civilisation, the records of which are being explored now in the Cretan excavations; an aboriginal people occupying the hinterland of the coast, not so highly cultivated as the coast dwellers (who had probably been civilised by Egyptian influences) but racially akin to them; a Northern people coming from the shores of the Baltic and the North Sea before the period of written history and combining ultimately with the people of the coast to found the Grecian civilisation, leaving in the hinterland, as they passed towards the sea, detachments which formed other mixed tribes, partly aboriginal, partly Nordic; various invading peoples of Semitic type from the Levant; the Romans, the Goths and the Huns, the Slavs and the Tartars, the Bulgars and the Serbs, the Normans, Saracens, and Turks. Because the Balkan Peninsula was on the natural path to a warm-water port from the north to the south of Europe; because it was on the track of invasion and counter-invasion between Asia

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and Europe, all this mixture of races was forced upon it, and as a consequence of the mixture a constant clash of warfare. There was, too, a current of more peaceful communication for purposes of trade between the Levant and the Black Sea on the one side and the peoples of the Baltic Sea on the other side, which flowed in part along the Balkan Peninsula.

In *Italy and her Invaders* Mr. T. Hodgkin suggests:

During the interval from 540 to 480 b.c. there was a brisk commercial intercourse between the flourishing Greek colonies on the Black Sea, Odessos, Istros, Tyras, Olbia and Chersonesos—places now

approximately represented by Varna, Kustendjix, Odessa, Cherson, and Sebastopol—between these cities and the tribes to the northward (inhabiting the country which has been since known as Lithuania), all of whom at the time of Herodotus passed under the vague generic name of Scythians. By this intercourse which would naturally pass up the valleys of the great rivers, especially the Dniester and the Dnieper, and would probably again descend by the Vistula and the Niemen, the settlements of the Goths were reached, and by its means the Ionian letter-forms were communicated to the Goths, to become in due time the magical and mysterious Runes.

One fact which lends great probability to this theory is that undoubtedly, from very early times, the amber deposits of the Baltic, to which allusion has already been made, were known to the civilised world; and thus

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the presence of the trader from the South among the settlements of the Guttones or Goths is naturally accounted for. Probably also there was for centuries before the Christian Era a trade in sables, ermines, and other furs, which were a necessity in the wintry North and a luxury of kings and nobles in the wealthier South. In exchange for amber and fur, the traders brought probably not only golden staters and silver drachmas, but also bronze from Armenia with pearls, spices, rich mantles suited to the barbaric taste of the Gothic chieftains. As has been said, this commerce was most likely carried on for many centuries. Sabres of Assyrian type have been found in Sweden, and we may hence infer that there was a commercial intercourse between the Euxine and the Baltic, perhaps 1300 years before Christ.

A few leading facts with dates should give a fairly clear impression of the story of the Balkan Peninsula. About 400 b.c. the Macedonian Empire was being founded. It represented the uprising of a hinterland Greek people over the decayed greatness of the coast-dwelling Greeks. At that time the northern part of the Balkan Peninsula was occupied by the Getae or Dacians. Phillip of Macedon made an alliance with the Getae. Alexander the Great of Macedonia thrashed them to subjection and carried a great wave of invasion into Asia from the Balkan Peninsula.

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TRAJAN'S COLUMN IN ROME

Commemorates the victories which brought all the Balkan Peninsula under the Roman sway

About the year 110 b.c. the Romans first came to the Balkan Peninsula, finding it inhabited as regards the south by the Greek peoples, as regards the north by the Getae or Dacians. The southern people were quickly subdued: the northern people were never really subdued by the Romans until the time of Trajan (the first century of the Christian era). He bridged the Danube with a great military bridge at the spot now known as Turnu-Severin, and Trajan's Column in Rome commemorated the victories which brought all the Balkan Peninsula under the Roman sway. Trajan found that the manners and customs of the Dacians were similar to those of the Germans. These sturdy Dacians were conquered but not exterminated by the Romans. Dacia across the Danube was made into a Roman colony, and the present kingdom of Roumania is supposed to represent the survival of that colony, which was a mixture of Roman and Dacian blood.

In the third century of the Christian era the Goths made their first appearance in the Balkan Peninsula. The Roman Empire had then entered into its period of decline. The invasions of the Visigoths, the Huns, the Vandals, the Ostrogoths,

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and the Lombards were to come in turn to overwhelm the Roman civilisation. The Gothic invasion of the Balkan Peninsula was begun in the reign of the Roman Emperor Phillip. Crossing the Danube, the Goths ravaged Thrace and laid siege to Marcianople (now Schumla) without success. In a later invasion the Goths attacked Philippopolis and captured it after a great defeat of the Roman general, Decius the younger. Then the Roman Emperor (Decius the elder) himself took the field and was defeated and killed in a great battle near the mouth of the Danube (a.d. 251). That may be called the decisive date in the history of the fall of the Roman Empire. It was destined to retrieve that defeat, and to shine with momentary glory again for brief intervals, but the destruction of the Emperor and his army by the Goths in 251 was the sure presage of the doom of the Roman Power.

One direct result of the battle in which Decius was slain was to bring the headquarters of the Roman Empire to the Balkan Peninsula. It was found that a better stand could be made against the tide of

Gothic invasion from a new capital closer to the Scythian frontier. Constantinople was planned and built, and became

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the capital of the Roman Empire (a.d. 330), and thus brought to the Balkan stage the death throes of the mightiest world-power that history has known. From that date it is wise for the sake of clearness to speak of the Roman Empire as the Greek Empire, though it was some time after its settlement in Constantinople before it became rather Greek than Roman in character.

With the issue between the Goths and the Greek Empire, in which peaceful agreements often interrupted for a while fierce campaigns, I cannot deal here at any length. It soaked the Balkan Peninsula deep in blood. But it was only the first of the horrors that were to mark the death of the Empire. Late in the fourth century of the Christian Era there burst into the Balkans from the steppes of Astrakhan and the Caucasus—from very much the same district that was afterwards to supply the Bulgars and the Serbs—the Tartar hordes of the Huns. Of these Huns there is a vivid contemporary Gothic account.

We have ascertained that the nation of the Huns, who surpassed all others in atrocity, came thus into being. When Filimer, fifth king of the Goths after their departure from Sweden, was entering Scythia, with his people, as we have before described, he found

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among them certain sorcerer-women, whom they called in their native tongue Haliorunnas (or Al-runas), whom he suspected and drove forth from the midst of his army into the wilderness. The unclean spirits that wander up and down in desert places, seeing these women, made concubines of them; and from this union sprang that most fierce people [of the Huns], who were at first little, foul, emaciated creatures, dwelling among the swamps, and possessing only the shadow of human speech by way of language.

THE WALLS OF CONSTANTINOPLE FROM THE SEVEN TOWERS

With the Alani especially, who were as good warriors as themselves, but somewhat less brutal in appearance and manner of life, they had many a struggle, but at length they wearied out and subdued them. For, in truth, they derived an unfair advantage from the intense hideousness of their countenances. Nations whom they would never have vanquished in fair fight fled horrified from those frightful—faces I can hardly call them, but rather—shapeless black collops of flesh, with little points instead of eyes. No hair on their cheeks or chins gives grace to adolescence or dignity to age, but deep furrowed scars instead, down the sides of their faces, show the impress of the iron which with characteristic ferocity they apply to every male child that is born among them, drawing blood from its cheeks before it is allowed its first taste of milk. They are little in stature, but lithe and active in their motions, and especially skilful in riding, broad-shouldered, good at the use of the bow and arrows, with sinewy necks, and always holding their heads high in their pride. To sum up, these beings under the form of man hide the fierce nature of the beast!

Not a lovable people the Huns clearly:

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and the modern peoples who have some slight ancestral kinship with them hate to be reminded of the fact. I remember the fierce indignation which a French war correspondent aroused in Bulgarian breasts by his description—which had eluded the censor—of the passage of a great Bulgarian train of ox wagons because he compared it to the passage of the Huns.

The Huns were, with the exception of the Persians who had vainly attacked the Greek States at an earlier period, the first successful Asiatic invaders of Europe. For a full century they ravaged the Empire, and the Balkan Peninsula felt the chief force of their barbarian rage. By the fifth century the waves of the Hun invasions had died away, leaving distinct traces of the Hunnish race in the Balkans. The Gepidae, the Lombards, and later the Hungarians and the Tartars then took up the task of ravaging the unhappy land which as the chief seat of power of the Greek Empire found itself the first objective of every invader because of that dignity and yet but poorly protected by that power. Constantinople was never taken by these

barbarians, but at some periods little else than its walls stood secure against their ravages.

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Meanwhile the first Saracens had appeared in the Peninsula, curiously enough not as invaders nor as enemies, but as mercenary soldiers in the army of the Greek Empire fighting against the Goths. To a Gothic chronicler we are again indebted for a vivid picture of these Saracens, "riding almost naked into battle, their long black hair streaming in the wind, wont to spring with a melancholy howl upon their chosen victim in battle and to suck his life-blood, biting at his throat." Perhaps the Gothic war correspondent of the day studied picturesqueness more than accuracy, like some of his modern successors. But, without a doubt, the first contact with Asiatics, whether Huns or Saracens, gave to the European peoples a horror and a terror which had never been inspired by their battles among themselves—battles by no means bloodless or merciful. As the Asiatic waves of invasion later developed in strength the unhappy Balkan Peninsula was doomed to feel their full force as they poured across the Bosphorus from Asia Minor, and across the Danube from the north-eastern Asiatic steppes.

It would be vain to attempt to chronicle even in the barest outline all the horrors inflicted upon

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the Balkans from the date of the first invasion of the Huns in the fourth century to the first invasion of the Turks in the fourteenth century. To say that those ten centuries were filled with bloodshed suffices. But they also saw the development of the Balkan nationalities of to-day, and cannot therefore be passed over without some attention. Let us then glance at each Balkan nation during that period.

Roumania, inhabited by the people of the old Roman-Dacian colony, stood full in the way of the Northern invasions of Goths, of Huns, of Hungarians, of Tartars. It was almost submerged. But in the thirteenth century the country benefited by the coming of Teutonic and Norman knights. The two kingdoms or principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia (which, combined, make up modern Roumania) were founded in this century.

Bulgaria.—In the seventh century Slavs had begun to settle in

Bulgaria. The Bulgars or Volgars followed. They were akin to the Tartars and the Turks. Together Slavs and Bulgars formed the Bulgarian national type and founded a very robust nation which was almost constantly at war with the Greek Empire (with its capital

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at Constantinople). At times Bulgaria seriously threatened Constantinople and the Greek Empire. A boastful inscription in the Church of the Forty Martyrs at Tirnovo, the ancient capital of Bulgaria, records:

In the year 1230, I, John Asên, Czar and Autocrat of the Bulgarians, obedient to God in Christ, son of the old Asên, have built this most worthy church from its foundations, and completely decked it with paintings in honour of the Forty holy Martyrs, by whose help, in the 12th year of my reign, when the Church had just been painted, I set out to Roumania to the war and smote the Greek army and took captive the Czar Theodore Komnenus with all his nobles. And all lands have I conquered from Adrianople to Durazzo, the Greek, the Albanian, and the Serbian land. Only the towns round Constantinople and that city itself did the Franks hold; but these too bowed themselves beneath the hand of my sovereignty, for they had no other Czar but me, and prolonged their days according to my will, as God had so ordained. For without him no word or work is accomplished. To him be honour for ever. Amen.

The wars were carried on under conditions of mutual ferocity which still rule in Bulgarian-Grecian conflicts. An incident of one campaign was that the Greek Emperor, Basil, the Bulgar-slayer, having captured a Bulgarian army, had the eyes torn out of all the men and sent them

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home blinded, leaving, however, one eye to every centurion, so that the poor mutilated wretches might have guides. In the early part of the fourteenth century a Bulgarian Czar, Michael, almost captured Constantinople. He formed a league with the Roumanians and the Greeks against the Serbs, who were at the time promising to become the paramount power of the peninsula. But Czar Michael was defeated by the Serbs and Bulgaria became dependent upon Serbia, which was the position of affairs at the time of the first serious Turkish invasion of the Balkan Peninsula.

Serbia.—Invading tribes of Don Cossacks began to come in great numbers to the Balkan Peninsula in the sixth century. In the seventh century they were encouraged by the Greek Empire to settle in Serbia, on condition of paying tribute to Constantinople. They set up a kind of aristocratic republic of a Slav type. In the ninth century they began to fight with the neighbouring and kindred Bulgarians. Early in the tenth century (a.d. 917) the Bulgarians almost effaced Serbia from the map; but the Serbs recovered after half a century, only to come shortly afterwards under the sway of the Greeks. In the eleventh

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century the Serbians held a very strong position and were able to harass the Greek Empire at Constantinople. They entered into friendly relations with the Pope of Rome, and for some time contemplated following the Roman rather than the Eastern Church. In the twelfth century King Stephen of Serbia was a valued ally of the Greek Empire against the Venetians. He established Serbia as a European "Power," and the Emperor Frederick Barbarossa visited his court at Belgrade. This king was the first of a succession of able and brave monarchs, and Serbia enjoyed a period of stable prosperity and power unusually lengthy for the Balkans. Except for the strife between the Eastern and Roman Catholic Churches for supremacy in Serbia, the nation was at peace within her own borders, and enjoyed not only a military but an economic predominance in the Balkans. Mining and handicrafts were developed, education encouraged, and the national organisation reached fully to the average standard of European civilisation at the time. By 1275 the Serbs were the chief power in the Balkans. They defeated the Greeks, marched right down to the Aegean and reached the famous monastery of Mount Athos, to which

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the first King Stephen (Nemanya) had retired in 1195 when he abdicated.

In 1303 the Serbians forgot their quarrel with the Greeks and helped them against the Turks, undertaking an invasion of Asia Minor. In 1315 they again saved the Greek Empire from the Turks. When in 1336 Stephen Dushan, the greatest of Serbian kings, who has been compared to Napoleon because of his military genius and capacity for

statesmanship, came to the throne, Bulgaria was under the suzerainty of Serbia, and the Serb monarch ruled over all that area comprised within the boundaries of Bulgaria, Serbia, Albania, Montenegro, and Greece by the recent treaty of Bucharest (1913). King Stephen Dushan was not only a great military leader, he was also a law-maker and a patron of learning. His death on December 13, 1356, at the Gates of Constantinople—he is said to have been poisoned—opened the way for the Turkish occupation of the Balkan Peninsula. That occupation was made possible in the first instance by the mutual jealousies of the Christian peoples of the Balkans. It was kept in existence for centuries by the same weaknesses arising from jealousy. In 1912 it was swept away in a month because in a spasm

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of common sense the Balkan Christian peoples had united. In 1913 it was in part restored because internecine strife had broken out again among the Balkan natives recently allied. It will probably continue until the lesson of unity is learned again.

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CHAPTER II

THE TURK IN THE BALKANS

It seems to be difficult to speak without violent prejudice on the subject of the Turk in the Balkans. One school of prejudice insists that the Turk is the finest gentleman in the world, who has been always

the victim and not the oppressor of the Christian peoples by whose side he lives, and whose territories he invaded with the best of motives and with the minimum of slaughter. The other school of prejudice credits the Turk with the most abominable cruelty, treachery, and lust, and will hear no good of him. In England the issue is largely a political one. A great Liberal campaign was once founded on a Turkish massacre of Bulgarians in the Balkans. That made it a party duty for Liberals to be pro-Bulgarian and anti-Turk, and almost a party duty for Conservatives to find all the

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Christian and a few ex-Christian virtues in the Turk. Before attempting to judge the Turk of to-day, let us see how he stands in the light of history. It was in the fourth century that the first Saracens came to the Balkan Peninsula as allies of the Greek Empire against the Goths. They were thus called in by a Christian Power in the first instance. It was not until the fourteenth century that the Turks made a serious attempt to occupy the Balkan Peninsula. They were helped in their campaign considerably by the Christian Crusaders, who, incidentally to their warfare against the Infidel who held the Holy Sepulchre, had made war on the Greek Empire, capturing Constantinople, and thus weakening the power of Christian Europe at its threshold. Bulgaria, too, refused help to the Greeks when the Turkish invasion had to be beaten off. The Turks' coming to the Balkans was thus largely due to Christian divisions.

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Sébah & Joaillier

SANCTA SOPHIA, CONSTANTINOPLE

Built by Justinian I, consecrated 538, converted into a Mohammedan mosque 1453. It is now thought that the design of its famous architect, Anthemius of Tralles, was never completed.

The minarets and most of the erections in the foreground are Turkish

Without being able at the time to capture Constantinople, the invading Turks occupied soon a large tract of the Balkan Peninsula. By 1362 they had captured Philippopolis and Eski Zagora, two important centres of Bulgaria. It was not a violence to their conscience for some

of the Bulgarian men after this to join the Turkish army as mercenaries. When the sorely-beset Greeks sent the Emperor John Paleologos to appeal for help to the Bulgarians, he was seized by them and kept as a prisoner.

A united Balkan Peninsula would have kept off the Turks, no doubt. But a set of small nations without any faculty of permanent cohesion, and hating and distrusting one another more thoroughly than they did the Turk, could do nothing. The Balkan nations of the time, though united they would have been really powerful, allowed themselves to be taken in detail and crushed under the heels of an invader who was alien in blood and in religion. In 1366 the Bulgarians became the vassals of the Turks, and the Serbians were defeated at Kossovo. The fall of the Greek Empire and the subjugation of Roumania followed in due course, and by the seventeenth century the Turks had penetrated to the very walls of Vienna. At one time it seemed as if all Europe would fall under the sway of Islam, for, as elsewhere than in the Balkans, there were Christian States which were treacherous to their faith. But that happily was averted. For the Balkan Peninsula, however,

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there were now to be centuries of oppression and religious persecution. It will be convenient once again to set forth under three national headings the chief facts regarding the Turkish conquest of the Balkans.

Bulgaria.—By 1366 weakness in the field and civil dissensions had brought Bulgaria to the humiliation of becoming the vassal of the Turk. In 1393 the Turks, not content with mere suzerainty, occupied Bulgaria and converted it into a Turkish province. In 1398 the Hungarians and the Wallachians (Roumanians) made a gallant attempt to free Bulgaria from the Turkish yoke, but failed. Some of the Bulgarians joined in with their Turkish conquerors, abandoned the Christian religion for that of Islam, and were the ancestors of what are known to-day as the Pomaks. The rest of the people gave a reluctant obedience to the Turkish conqueror, preserving their Christian faith, their Slav tongue, and their sense of separate nationality. The Greeks, who had come to some kind of terms with the Turkish invaders, assisted to bring the Bulgarian people under subjection. The Greek church and the Greek tongue rather than the Turkish were

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