BULGARIA AND HER NEIGHBORS: AN HISTORIC PRESENTATION OF THE BACKGROUND OF THE BALKAN PROBLEM, ONE OF THE BASIC ISSUES OF THE WORLD-WAR

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HISTORICUS

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Trieste

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and Her Neighbors

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FOREWORD

EVER since the Balkan War of 1912 the Balkan States—Bulgaria, Greece and Serbia—have been in the limelight of public interest and the object of public discussion. The newspaper and magazine articles and the books which have been published treating of the Balkan situation, are so numerous that one could easily form a voluminous library of them. In these publications the Balkan problem has been approached and discussed from various points of view, both by those who are directly concerned in its solution and by those who treat of it as outsiders and impartial judges.

One would have supposed that with so much and so varied a material on hand, anyone desirous of becoming acquainted with the facts of the Balkan question could do so easily. Unfortunately, this is not the case, especially with the people on this side of the ocean.

It may be that the very volume and variety of the literature extant on the subject serve to befog and confuse the student of Balkan politics instead of enlightening him. Much of what has been or is being written is the product of imperfect knowledge or ignorance, while not a little is tinged with prejudice or partisan passion.

Statements that have no basis in either history or fact, are daily met with in the public press, and go to prove how dangerous a thing a little knowledge is, and what misconceptions there are in people's minds as to the real points at issue in the Balkans. And yet, a clear understanding of the various factors and phases of the Balkan situation is of great importance not only for the right comprehension of the origin of the present European war, but also for the future peace of the Balkan Peninsula and of Europe.

No one can deny that the war that is now devastating Europe was brought about principally, if not solely, by the clash of the political and economic interests of the Great Powers, especially Austria and Russia, in the Balkan Peninsula. The Balkan wars of 1912 and 1913, and the Bucharest Treaty of August 10, 1913, which upset the previously existing state of things on the Peninsula, intensi-

fied the political tension between Austria and Russia on the one hand, and among the Balkan States on the other. An Austro-Russian struggle for supremacy in the Balkan Peninsula sooner or later was inevitable, and it was due solely to an untoward event—the assassination of the Austrian heir to the throne and his wife in June, 1914—that the conflict was precipitated.

The Balkan question has at all times been a serious menace to the peace of Europe, and such a menace it will remain so long as it is not settled in a permanent and satisfactory manner. In what way it will be settled, we do not presume to foretell, but we feel sure that if it is not settled to the saisfaction of the legitimate national demands of the Balkan peoples the Peninsula will again become the arena of political intrigues and ambitions. There will still be a Balkan question, to weigh like an incubus upon European diplomats and disturb their pleasant dreams of a lasting peace in Europe.

Every one who has studied the subject agrees that the Berlin Congress of 1878, which undertook to settle the Balkan question, proved a failure because the European Powers which took part in the Congress faced the question not from an equitable and statesmanlike point of view, for the good of the Balkan peoples, but for the satisfaction of their mutual jealousies and prejudices and the furtherance of their own selfish interests. The Treaty of Berlin of 1878, instead of bringing peace to the Balkan Peninsula, created discontent and disillusionment and left the door open to unrest and intrigue. It is to be hoped that the Peace Conference that will rearrange the status of Europe after this war will prove more farsighted and intelligent than was the Berlin Congress in the settlement of the Balkan question.

Our object, however, is not to discuss the politics of the war but to dispel certain erroneous conceptions about the Balkan situation and to establish facts which seem to be ignored by many who treat that situation.

BULGARIA AND HER NEIGHBORS

I

Who and What Are the Bulgarians of To-Day?

By the middle of the seventh century A. D., according to the testimony of Byzantine historians, the Balkan Peninsula was settled by Slavs. Their settlements extended almost over the whole peninsula as far south as Epirus, Thessaly, and even Greece. Geographical names of villages, rivers, mountains, etc., retained to this day in these countries plainly show the extent of the Slavic colonization. In the second half of the seventh century (679) a band of warlike *Bulgars* crossed over the Danube into the present Dobruja, quickly subdued the Slavic tribes living there and extended their domination to the east over other Slavic communities. What the numerical strength of these Bulgar conquerors was is not known, but the historians Shaffarik and Iretchek, whose works are considered authoritative on the subject, say that it could not have been very large.

The ease with which the Bulgar invaders conquered the various Slavic tribes, and welded them into a state or kingdom is explained by the fact that these tribes or communities lived a separate existence, independent of one another, each under a petty chief of its own. To what race these Bulgar warriors belonged is still a matter of dispute. Some historians think they were Tartars, others class them as Finns or Turks. One thing is certain: they were not Slavs. The numerical inferiority of these Bulgars to the overwhelming mass of their Slav subjects is plainly proved by the fact that in less than 200 years after their establishment in the Balkan Peninsula, they were completely assimilated and absorbed by the Slavs, leaving nothing behind them but their name to designate the people they had conquered and the state they had founded. The Slavs, who before their subjugation by the Bulgar invaders were designated by various tribal names, became thenceforth known