

CAMPAIGNING IN THE BALKANS

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649407200

Campaigning in the Balkans by Harold Lake

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HAROLD LAKE

**CAMPAIGNING
IN THE BALKANS**

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BY

Lieutenant Harold Lake



NEW YORK

ROBERT M. MCBRIDE & COMPANY

1918

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PART I

CHAPTER I

THE BULGAR ON THE HILL

THERE is a hill which rises to the north of the small and ugly village of Ambarkoj, which in its turn is twelve miles north of Salonika. It is not a particularly impressive hill, but it happens to command a good view of the country for many miles around, so I climbed to the top of it, uncomfortably enough by reason of the tangle of evergreen oak, the harsh edges of the rock, and the thickets of brambles. Right on the summit I found all that the birds and beasts and sun and storm of Macedonia had left of a man who must have fallen in one of the half-forgotten wars which have troubled the land. There were the scattered bones. Rags of clothing were embedded in the ground. Close at hand a couple of clips of cartridges proved that he had fallen in the midst of his fight. There was the merest remnant of his cap, and there was a button which showed him to have been a Bulgarian. His rifle had been taken

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away but the rest had been left as it fell, left to remain through the years, to be a symbol and token of all that land which one could see standing there beside the tangled rubbish which used to be a man.

It is hard to think of a better place than that for the beginning of some account of the country of which so many tens of thousands of our men are gaining an intimate knowledge, and of their difficulties and sufferings and achievements. From that high place it is possible to see all the different kinds of land which go to make up Macedonia, and to remember all the problems which mountain, valley, and plain present. And those forgotten bones were the witness of the history of the country, of all that past conduct of its affairs, of all its custom and habit—of all those things which are producing so direct an effect on our life today. It may not appear that there is an connection between a dead Bulgarian on a little hill three thousand miles away and the war-time price of sugar in England, and yet the connection exists, and will be made plain later on.

If you were to stand where I was standing and face the north, you would have on your left a great plain rolling away to a blue wall of distant mountains in the west. Immediately before you, but still a little to the left, you would see a line of trees and a fresh green in the herbage which would

THE BULGAR ON THE HILL

prove the presence of water with occasional swamps. Due north and on all the right would be the hills, some of them smooth and gentle, some of them great gray mountains. Between them you would find the little valleys, and the occasional habitations of men.

One valley there is in particular. It lies at the foot of the hill which, indeed, closes the southern end of it. From the line where the evergreen oak ends it sweeps downward very gently and delicately for about a couple of miles to where a tiny village stands at the foot of its eastern slope, and then winds out of sight round a westerly bend. On either side it is fenced by considerable hills. They rise about it, very grim and forbidding. It is not an easy valley to enter from any direction, and in consequence it has all the appearance of prosperity and comfort. The soil is cultivated. There are the wide fields of maize, and the great patches of tobacco. In one part of it I found a whole series of plots given over to funny little plants which made me realize for the first time that the tomato and the vegetable marrow are very closely related to each other. There is abundant pasture. Two small square towers of whitish brick mark the presence of springs, and all the appearance of the ground proves that you could find water anywhere by sinking a well twenty feet deep or less. The houses of the village have a