

THE PRINCESS SOPHIA: A NOVEL

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The Princess Sophia: A Novel by E. F. Benson

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E. F. BENSON

**THE PRINCESS
SOPHIA: A NOVEL**

The Princess Sophia

A Novel

by E. F. Benson

Author of "The Vintage" "Limitations"

"Dodo" "The Judgment Books"

"The Caprina" etc.



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HARPER & BROTHERS PUBLISHERS
MCM

TO
MY DEAR FRIEND
CRITIC, SISTER
I Affectionately Dedicate
THIS BOOK

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THE PRINCESS SOPHIA

INTRODUCTORY

THE independent principality of Rhodopé lies, as every one knows, on the wooded coast-line of Albania. Its territory, no greater than the area of the English counties palatine, is triangular in shape, the base of the triangle (a line some twenty miles long if measured as the crow flies, but more like a hundred if we follow the indentations and promontories of that superbly fertile land) being washed by the waters of the Adriatic. It is bounded on the south by the kingdom of Greece, and up to its northern border extends the benign rule of that most pitiful and Christian monarch the Sultan of Turkey.

Rhodopé preserved during the Græco-Turkish War of 1897 (I am almost ashamed to remind my readers of events so recent) a strict neutrality, though the offers made it by both one side and the other might well have been enough to turn a less level head than that of Prince Leonard, the ruling sovereign. For an Imperial Iradé, with promise of a definite Hatt (I think I have the terms correctly), arrived from the

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most Christian monarch, prospectively granting the cession of Corfu to the Prince, when Greece lay crushed beneath the heel of the Sultan, if only his beloved brother (so the Sultan was pleased to say) would join the cause of the imminently victorious Turks; while from the other side a cleverly worded sketch pictured the immense advantage it would be to Rhodopé if by an extension of its territory it was so arranged that the Upper Valley of the river Strypos—the Golden River, as it is not inaptly named—a plain of surpassing fertility, and odorous with the finest growths of tobacco, should pour its revenues into the coffers of the Prince.

Indeed, Prince Leonard, when these two propositions, which arrived almost simultaneously, were under his consideration, must have had a strong head not to have been overcome by the intoxication of one or the other prospect. He knew—and sober and bald politicians tell me that he did not overestimate the importance of his position (a malady most incident to autocrats)—that the balance of power, inevitably determining the result of the war, as he sided with Turkey or Greece, was in his hands; also he would have the singular pleasure of perhaps playing the deuce with that wonderfully harmonious comic opera the Concert of the Powers. A scribbled word from him would—and he was not too sanguine in so believing—give him Corfu if the envelope of his reply was addressed to Yıldız Kiosk, or, if to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs at Athens, the nicotic valley of the Upper Strypos.

A glance at the map is sufficient to show that the