



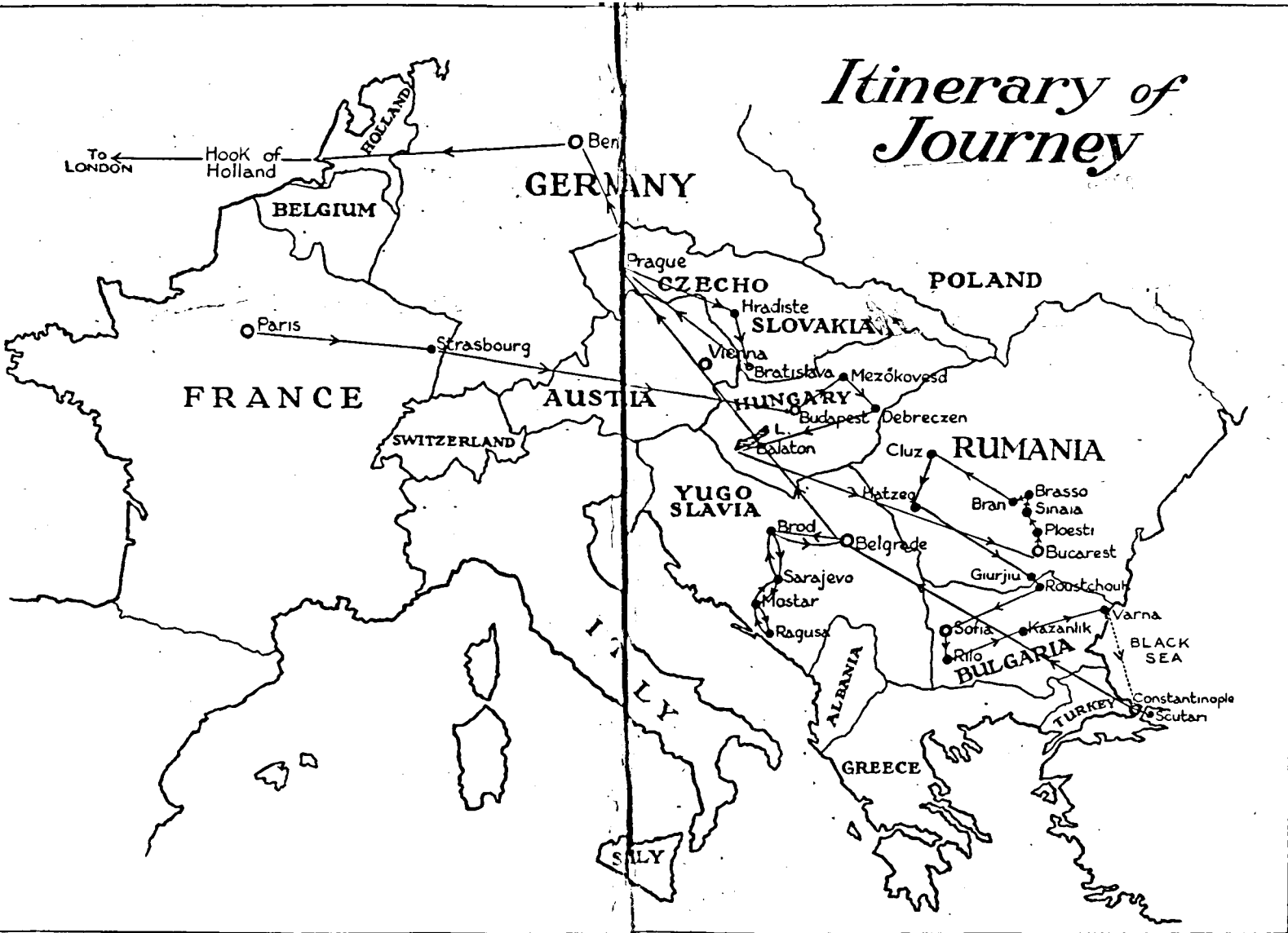
MY WANDERINGS IN THE BALKANS

By
DUDLEY HEATHCOTE

With 32 illustrations

Macrae · Smith · Company

Itinerary of Journey



MY WANDERINGS IN THE BALKANS



Marie 1924

THE QUEEN OF ROUMANIA.

Frontispiece.

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By
DUDLEY HEATHCOTE

*WITH 32 ILLUSTRATIONS
AND 2 MAPS*

MACRAE—SMITH—COMPANY,
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PREFACE

Certain it is that my anticipations with regard to the journey that I was contemplating in the Balkans were not *couleur de rose*. I realised that a new Europe had been moulded out of the old, and that a variety of new States had come into being on the alleged reason that the majority of their populations were demanding independence. It mattered little whether it was economically sound or unsound that this or that race should be given national status ; the only fact that they demanded, or were assumed to be demanding, such independence was in itself sufficient to justify the map of Europe being made out anew.

And, consequently, upon schoolboys, and even those among their elders who had forgotten how to learn, was imposed the disagreeable necessity of assimilating entirely new geographical data.

For many of the countries that I was going to visit, moreover, I entertained great sympathies. Some I had visited ; others were only known to me through what others had written or told me about them. Try as I would, I could not overcome a latent doubt that I would find dissatisfaction among many, and a certain suspicion that at least in some cases the old régime was as good as the present.

I was told that travelling in many parts of the Balkans would be comfortless ; far more, in fact, than what I could ever imagine to be possible from my previous experience ; that trains would be unpunctual ; and that, as I doubtless knew, I would have in some regions to put up with very mediocre food and most primitive hygienic conditions.

All these things I realised, yet, overcoming every possible objection and stilling every voice, was the Call which impels man to leave his home and explore new fields, and which, when

he really has heard it, will continue to haunt his footsteps and impel him forward on a new quest, as long as infirmity or old age do not come to check his roving aspirations.

There is, in reality, no higher pleasure in life than to explore new lands . . . and, like in a story, it is not the dénouement that matters—for all can successfully terminate a journey; it is the beginning and the body; the bones of the bone and the blood of the blood of the beginning.

And with that I will leave off this preface with apologies for a travel book that can only pretend to give my own personal impressions. If I can, however, only make the reader visualise something of the variety of elements that have contributed to the making of them, I shall be content.

THE BALKANS

FOR many years the Balkan district has bred unrest and war and constituted a grave peril to the rest of Europe, the inextricable medley of races that was found in it being undoubtedly at the root of most of the mischief.

Everywhere the same features abounded. Races scattered all over the region, rarely found in large groups together, but more usually inextricably mixed with other races; settlements that were forced upon men by circumstances and upheld by force . . . Slovaks and Slovenes, Serbs and Croatians, Czechs and Poles, Ruthenians, Italians, Bosnian Moslems, Germans and Magyars, Roumanians, Turks and Bulgars . . . a very Tower of Babel.

Of these, part were included in realms that gave economic unity to the various disparate elements that constituted them; part were subjected to the most strenuous assimilation.

It was, in fact, a region in which races were constantly clashing together or combining in the hope of rectifying conditions to which there seemed no possible solution.

Prominent among these nations, two great Empires, the first, the Austro-Hungarian, with a population of fifty-three millions, of which only seven millions were Austrians; the second, the Turkish, with an equally disparate population of over eighteen millions.

Then with the War and the defeat of the Central Powers a new solution was found by which it was hoped to bring peace to a very distracted world, and an attempt was made to rectify boundaries and to make them more clean-cut ethnically.

How has this solution worked? We know that, applying the principle of self-determination, the Allies not only dismembered Austria and Turkey, but earnestly sought to evolve order out of the prevailing chaos. All elements within these two countries, which were not German or Turkish respectively, were merged into the neighbouring countries.

Transylvania was ceded to Roumania; Croatia, Bosnia, Herzegovina, Slovenia and Dalmatia were incorporated into the Kingdom of the Serbs; a separate existence was vouchsafed to Hungary, and a new republic called Czecho-Slovakia constituted out of the provinces of Bohemia, Moravia and Slovakia.

This was a settlement which at first sight appeared likely to meet with success, but in which the policy at first adopted by most of the new Succession States has done much to undo the good work that has been accomplished.

It is evident that the new Powers have so far failed to realise the enormous difficulties of the problem that they are essaying to solve, and that the present settlement having only tended to create further ethnical difficulties, since clean-cut ethnical boundaries are out of the question from the very nature of the Balkans, it is preferable to adopt an entirely different policy from the one which hitherto has found favour among the nations of Eastern Europe.

Let the new States, therefore, abandon the idea that the alien races, which are subject to their rule, can and will become assimilated by the process of force, but rather let them inaugurate a series of federations of free nations on an economic or political basis. Herein lies, in my opinion, the only way in which national unity can be attained and our only hope of terminating the unstable conditions that we are so used to associate with anything Balkanic

Still, there are far better and more attractive things in the Balkans than wars and rumours of wars. Here the feeling of the East is ever in the air; the riot of colour and rhythm, fine scenery, picturesque costumes—all the things that carry beauty and the feeling of adventure with them; while, sordid as are the conditions of many of the poor, they, too, seem to possess

some wonderful armour that lifts them above their surroundings, for even in the places where you least expect it you will find a striving after beauty. . . .

All the primitive nations inhabiting this region, in fact, achieve beauty without apparent effort, thanks to a passionate search for order and self-expression, which has enabled them to create and keep alive a folk-lore and art of which more civilised nations are utterly incapable.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
PREFACE - - - - -	v
THE BALKANS - - - - -	vii
ACKNOWLEDGMENT - - - - -	xv
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS - - - - -	xvii
BOOK I HUNGARY	
INTRODUCTION - - - - -	21
I. IN BUDAPEST—IN THE CORSO - - - - -	25
II. GAY RESTAURANTS - - - - -	26
III. THE CHURCH OF ST. STEPHEN - - - - -	28
IV. THE CHARM OF BUDAPEST - - - - -	30
V. HUNGARIAN WEDDINGS—A VISIT TO MEZOKOVESD - - - - -	32
VI. DEBRECZEN, THE CALVINIST CITY - - - - -	40
VII. DEBRECZEN (<i>continued</i>)—A VISIT TO THE MEDICAL SCHOOL - - - - -	45
VIII. AN EXCURSION TO LAKE BALATON - - - - -	47
IX. WHAT BOLSHEVISM COST HUNGARY—A POLITICAL DIGRESSION - - - - -	50
BOOK II ROUMANIA	
INTRODUCTION - - - - -	57
I. BUCAREST—"PETIT PARIS" - - - - -	59
II. VISITING THE OIL MINES - - - - -	64
III. A ROUMANIAN MONASTERY AT SINAIA - - - - -	70
IV. IN BRASSO—THE BLACK CHURCH - - - - -	73
V. A VISIT TO THE QUEEN OF ROUMANIA AT THE CASTLE OF BRAN - - - - -	79
VI. CLUJ - - - - -	87
VII. A STRONG, SILENT MAN—INTERVIEW WITH THE ROUMANIAN PREMIER - - - - -	94
VIII. ROUMANIAN FOLK-LORE AND CUSTOMS - - - - -	100

BOOK III

BULGARIA

CHAPTER	PAGE
INTRODUCTION - - - - -	109
I. WHERE EAST AND WEST ARE ONE—IN ROUSTOUK -	111
II. DANCING THE HORO - - - - -	114
III. THE ROOKS OF SOFIA - - - - -	116
IV. THE CHURCH OF ALEXANDER NEVSKY - - - - -	118
V. THE VALLEY OF ROSES - - - - -	120
VI. PILGRIMS IN THE NIGHT - - - - -	123
VII. RILO MONASTERY - - - - -	128
VIII. IMPRESSIONS OF KING BORIS - - - - -	135
IX. INTERVIEW WITH GENERAL VOLKOFF - - - - -	140
X. INTERVIEW WITH ALEXANDROFF - - - - -	147
XI. BULGARIAN LIFE AND FOLK-LORE - - - - -	151

BOOK IV

TURKEY

INTRODUCTION - - - - -	157
I. ON THE WAY TO CONSTANTINOPLE - - - - -	159
II. A TURKISH DOCTOR - - - - -	162
III. HOWLING DERVISHES - - - - -	165
IV. THE SELAMLIK - - - - -	169
V. THE LURE OF THE BAZAARS - - - - -	172
VI. THE OLD SERAI - - - - -	176
VII. "MINARETS ARE STEEPLES IN WHICH THE HUMAN VOICE TAKES THE PLACE OF THE BELLS" -	178
VIII. ON THE BRIDGE OF GALATA - - - - -	180
IX. EUNUCHS - - - - -	182
X. THE NEW TURKEY - - - - -	188
XI. THE WOMEN OF TURKEY - - - - -	198

BOOK V

THE KINGDOM OF THE SERBS, CROATS AND
SLOVENES

CHAPTER	PAGE
INTRODUCTION - - - - -	203
I. BELGRADE—AT THE COURT BALL - - -	205
II. A VISIT TO THE ETHNOGRAPHICAL MUSEUM -	211
III. IN BELGRADE, THE WHITE CITY—STREET SCENES -	214
IV. THE VIEW FROM THE KALMEGDAN (PUBLIC GARDENS) - - - - -	216
V. AT THE RUSSIAN RESTAURANT - - - - -	218
VI. SARAJEVO - - - - -	222
VII. MOSTAR, A MOSLEM CITY - - - - -	230
VIII. WHERE THE SUN SHINES—A VISIT TO DUBROVNIC (RAGUSA) - - - - -	236
IX. INTERVIEW WITH KING ALEXANDER - - - - -	249
X. THE CROATIAN PROBLEM - - - - -	251
XI. THE PROBLEM OF ALBANIA - - - - -	258
XII. THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE KINGDOM OF THE SERBS, CROATS, AND SLOVENES -	261

BOOK VI

CZECHO-SLOVAKIA

INTRODUCTION - - - - -	269
I. PRAGUE THE IMMORTAL - - - - -	273
II. A SLOVAK MUSICIAN—IN BRATISLAVA - - -	281
III. A NOBLE PRESIDENT—INTERVIEW WITH PRESI- DENT MASARYK - - - - -	286
IV. THE PROBLEM OF SLOVAKIA - - - - -	291
V. THE LAND FOR THE PEOPLE - - - - -	295
VI. SLOVAK PEASANT ARTISTS - - - - -	299
VII. A COMPARISON OF VARIOUS FORMS OF PEASANT ART - - - - -	306

BOOK VII

GENERAL

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. WOMEN OF THE BALKANS - -	311
II. FORMS OF BACKSHICH IN MANY LANDS - -	315

I have to thank the Editor of the *Fortnightly Review*, the Editor of the *Contemporary Review*, the Editor of the *Weekly Westminster*, the Editor of the *Daily News*, the Editor of the *Daily Sketch*, the Editor of the *Graphic*, the Editor of the *Sphere*. and the Editor of the *Sunday Illustrated Herald* for permission to republish certain chapters of this book.

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

The Queen of Roumania	-	-	-	<i>Frontispiece</i>
				FACING PAGE
Hungarian National Costume. Bride and Bridegroom (N. Hungary)	-	-	-	30
Hungarian National Costume, Mezokovesd	-	-	-	34
Roumanian Banat Costume	-	-	-	60
Roumanian Banat Costume	-	-	-	70
Transylvanian Costume	-	-	-	90
Monsieur Bratiano, Prime Minister of Roumania	-	-	-	96
Peasant of Cornarera-Banat	-	-	-	102
National Costumes, Roumania. Young Girls of Borlova	-	-	-	106
The Cathedral of Alexander Nevsky, Sofia	-	-	-	114
The Cathedral of Alexander Nevsky, Sofia	-	-	-	118
Interior of Cathedral of Alexander Nevsky, Sofia	-	-	-	126
The Church of Rilo	-	-	-	130
A View of Rilo from the Hills	-	-	-	134
Mosque of the Sultan Achmed, Constantinople	-	-	-	164
St. Sophia, Constantinople	-	-	-	178
Serbian Musicians	-	-	-	212
Croat National Costume	-	-	-	226
King Alexander of Yugo-Slavia	-	-	-	248
Cathedral of San Barbara, Prague	-	-	-	269
Spanish Hall in the Castle of Prague	-	-	-	276
Clock of the Old Town Hall, Prague	-	-	-	278
Palace of the Archbishop of Prague	-	-	-	280
Cathedral of St. Guy, Prague	-	-	-	282
Refectory, Strahof Monastery, Prague	-	-	-	284
President Masaryk	-	-	-	288
Library of the Monastery of Strahof, Prague	-	-	-	294
Village of Slovakia	-	-	-	296
Slovak Costume	-	-	-	302
Slovak Costumes at Wedys	-	-	-	314
The Old Town Hall, Prague	-	-	-	316
Castle of Hluboka, Czecho-Slovakia	-	-	-	318

INDEX

- ABDUL HAMID, 184
 Visit to one of his wives, 184-187
 Adnan Bey, 162-164
 Adrianople, 225
 Adriatic, the, 47
 Ægean Sea, the, 109, 146, 157
 Aehranthal, 287
 Aivalik, 196
 Albania, 258-260
 Anarchy in, 259
 Primitive conditions of, 260
 Alexander II., 129
 Alexander, King of Serbia, 207
 208, 245-250
 Interview with, 245-250
 Memories of Great War, 246
 Tastes of, 249, 250
 Views on British statesmen, 247
 Alexander Nevsky Church, 110,
 118, 119, 159
 Alexandroff, interview with, 147-150
 Algiers, 168
 Anatolia, 157, 165, 190, 198
 Andrassy, Count, 26
 Anglo-French Alliance, 248, 249
 Angora, 169, 171
 Arabian horses, 43
 Arabs, 192
 Arad, 53
 Ardahan, 192, 194
 Arpad, 53
 Assumption and Charlemagne
 Church, 276
 Athos, Mount, 71
 Attar of Roses, 109, 120-122
 Augustan Gate, 176
 Avasfelfofalu, 53
 Awakening Magyars, 34, 36

 BACKSHICH, Forms of, 162-164, 315
 et seq.
 Bagdad Pavilion, 177
 Baird, Lieut.-Colonel, 138
 Baiulescu, Dr. George, 76, 79, 80, 85
 Balaton Foldvar, 48
 Balaton Furad, 48
 Balaton Lake, 47-49
 Balkan people, characteristics of,
 238, 239
 Balkans, the, characteristics of, 7
 Beauty and colour in, 8, 9
 Banat, the, 57, 192, 203
 Baroque style, 276-279
 Basaltic cones, 48
 Beauce, 95
 Begoya Dzamia Mosque, 225
 Bela Khun, 50, 52, 53
 Belgrade, 205-221
 Benes, Dr. Edouard, 208, 262
 Besserabia, 57
 Bethlen, Count, conversations with,
 40, 50-52, 54
 Bezestan, 172
 Bibles, Hungarian, 42
 Black Church, the, 75-77
 Black Death, the, 239
 Black Sea, the, 109, 157, 165
 Blagaj, 234, 235
 Bocitoare, the, 103
 Bohemia, 8, 269
 Bolshevism, 50-54, 141-144, 148, 149
 What Bolshevism cost Hungary,
 50-54
 Boris, King of Bulgaria, 110, 117,
 135-139, 159
 Bosna River, 223
 Bosnia, 8, 205, 222, 287
 Bosnia Brod, junction, 222
 Bosnian scenery, 223
 Bosphorus, the, 177, 182
 Boyana, 114
 Bran, Castle of, 80-86
 Brasso, 73-78, 80
 Bratiano, Monsieur Jean, interview
 with, 94-99
 Bratic, Dr., 242
 Bratislava, 52, 281-285
 Braun, 279
 Bridge of Charles, the, 275, 278
 Bridge tolls, 193

- British ignorance with regard to the
 Balkans, 229, 266
 Brokoff, 279
 Broussa, 185
 Bucarest, 59-63, 85
 Budapest, 23, 30, 31
 Bukovac, 242
 Bukovina, 57, 102
 Bulgaria, 109-157, 203
 Bulgarian Army, the, 140-146
 Churches, 118, 119
 Costumes, 113, 307
 Customs, 111, 152, 153
 Dances, 114, 115, 153
 Folk-lore, 151-153
 Funerals, 111, 152
 Gypsies, 160
 Instruments, 114, 115, 153
 Monasteries, 123-134
 Notes, 112
 Reparations, 109
 Rooks, 116, 117
 Rose plantations, 109, 120-122
 Scenery, 123, 159
 Women, 314
 Buna, 234, 235
 Buxton, Noel, interview with King
 of Serbia, 247
 Buyuk, 160
 Byzantine crosses, 85
- CAFE LIFE, HUNGARIAN, 42
 Calea Victoriei, 58, 60, 61
 Caliph, the, 157, 169-171
 And the Nationalists, 169, 171
 His bodyguard, 170
 His kaik, 171
 His selamlik, 170, 171
 Calvinists, Hungarian, 40
 Capitulations, 189
 Carcassonne, 236
 Carmen Sylva, her views on mon-
 archy, 81
 Carniola, 203
 Carpathian Mountains, 57
 Carsija, 223
 Cataj, 303
 Cavala, 196
 Chaplin, Charlie, 302
 Charles, Emperor, 48, 49
 Chateaubriand, 242
 Chezi, 189
 Chikos, Hungarian, 43, 44
 Cluj, 45, 87-93, 98
 Visit to, 87-93
 University of, 45
 Coachmen of Bucarest, 59, 60, 186
 Constantine the Great, 178
- Constantinople, 158, 160-187
 Approach to, 160, 161
 Charm of, 172
 Conventions of Bucarest, 60, 61
 Corner Tower, Prague, 276
 Cossacks, 218-220
 Court ball at Belgrade, 205-210
 Dancing the Horo, 208, 209
 How Serbians dance, 208, 209
 Court life in Bulgaria, 137, 138
 Croatia, 8, 21, 203, 229
 Croatian peasant party, *see* Croatian
 problem.
 Croatian problem, 229, 230, 249,
 251 *et seq.*
 Csaki, Count, 26
 Csardas, Hungarian, 88
 Curzon, Marquess, 247
 His offer to King of Serbia, 247
 Customs Houses of the air, 103
 Czech character, 269
 Contempt of religion, 292
 Land Reform, 294-298
 Treatment of Slovaks, 291-294
 Women, 311
 Czecho Slovakia, 8, 21, 269-307
- DACIA, 101
 Dalmatia, 8, 203
 Damascus, 172
 Danube, 30, 31, 47, 57, 93, 109, 110
 Davidovic, Monsieur, 148, 249, 253-
 255
 Deak, Francis, 28
 Debreczen, 40-46, 306
 Breeding establishment of, 42, 43
 Market place of, 42
 Medical school at, 45, 46
 Municipal stables, 42
 University of, 42
 Decebalus, 101
 Dervishes, howling, 165-168
 Dervishes of Sarajevo, 228, 229
 Dinaric Alps, 227, 230
 Dniester, 57
 Dobroudja, 109
 Doinas, 105
 Dolma Bagtche Palace, 169, 177
 Dombovitz, 57, 61
 Drama, 196
 Dubnitz, 124
 Dubrovnic, 236-244
 A rival to Venice, 240
 Aristocracy of, 237, 238
 Beauty of, 236, 237, 240, 241
 Costumes of, 241
 History of, 239, 240
 Illegitimate children of, 243, 244

- Dubrovnic.—*Continued.*
 Monastery Court of, 241, 242
 Vegetation of, 241
 Duca, Monsieur, 208
- EASTWELL PARK, Queen of Roumania at, 82
 Embroideries of Bulgaria, 307
 Czecho Slovakia, 299-305
 Hungary, 35, 306 *et seq.*
 Roumania, 83, 84, 307
 Yugo Slavia, 307
 Esterhazy, 297
 Ethnographical Museum, Belgrade, 211-213
 Eunuchs, 16, 182-187
 Characteristics of, 185
 Utility of, 184
 Visit to, 182-187
 Euxinograde, 139
 Exchange of populations, Turks and Greeks, 195, 196
- FAN NOLI, 259
 Federalism, 148, 254
 Federation Balkanique, 148
 Fenar lighthouse, 169
 Ferdinand, Archduke of Austria, 226, 227
 Assassination of, 227
 Feeling of townspeople with regard to murder of, 227
 Place where murdered, 226, 227
 Visit to Sarajevo, 226, 227
 Warning given to, 227
 Ferdinand, King of Bulgaria, 137
 Ferrer, Vincent, 279
 Fiume, 21, 264
 France and the Little Entente, 68
- GADULKA, 153
 Gaida, 153
 Galata, Bridge of, 169, 177, 178, 180, 181, 193
 Gate of Happiness, 176
 Gavrilovic, Monsieur, 207
 Gellert, Mount, 23
 George, King of England, 85
 George, Prince of Serbia, 246
 Georgia, 157
 German minorities in Brasso, 74-76
 Gibbon, his view on eunuchs, 184, 185
 Gibraltar, 237
 Gjorgjic, 237, 238
 Gjorgjiu, 93
 Golden Horn, 160, 161, 165, 169, 177
 Goldmark, 92
 Performance of one of his operas at Cluj, 92, 93
- Gothic architecture, 29, 274-276
 Greek women, 313
 Gypsies, 27, 61
- HAIIDUKS, 152, 283
 Halide Hanoum, 198
 Hardy, 290
 Harems, disappearance of, 199
 Hatseg, visit to, 98.
 Hedjas, 190
 Hera, Temple of, 169
 Herzegovina, 8, 203
 Hilsner, 287
 Hlinka, 284, 285, 291
 Honolulu, 198
 Hood, Robin, 152
 Horthy, Admiral, 22
 Hortogaby, Plain of, 32, 42
 Houses of Parliament, Hungarian, 28, 31
 Howling Dervishes, 165-168
 Hradcany, 276, 279
 Hradiste, 299
 Hrastnik, 263
 Hungarian acting compared with Roumanian, 92, 93
 Beds, 41
 Cafés, 42
 Coachmen 32, 41
 Costumes 32-34, 37, 41, 306 *et seq.*
 Dancing, 38
 Embroideries, 35
 Food, 26, 27, 34
 Horse herds, 43, 44, 106
 Horses, 43, 44
 Instruments, 38
 Landowners in Transylvania, 316 *et seq.*
 Loan, the, 21
 Minorities, 52, 57, 78, 84, 98, 99, 288, 316 *et seq.*
 Music, 27, 37, 220, 221
 National character, 31
 Parliament, 28, 29
 Peasants, 35, 36, 306
 Plain, the, 30, 32, 39, 43
 Protestants, 40
 Reparations, 50
 Restaurants, 26, 27
 Weddings, 32-39
 Women, 31, 312
 Hungary, 8, 21-57
 Hussein Djahed Bey, 197
 Hussein, King, 192
- ILIANA, PRINCESS, 80
 Ilidze, Plain of, 222, 227, 239
 Inkey, Baron, 27

Inoculation Officer, Turkish, 163, 164
 Iraq, 194
 Ismet Pacha, 193
 Italian party in Albania, 260
 Italian treaty with Yugo Slavia, 248
 Ivan Plannina, 230
 Ivan Rilsky, 129, 130
 Ivan Sattel, 230

JABLANICA, 231

James, Henry, 289
 Janissaries, 176
 Janosik, 283
 Joseph, Archduke, 49
 Judas Tedeas, 279
 Justinian, Palace of, 169

KALMEGDAN, view from, 216

Karolyi, Count, 50, 52, 53
 Karolyi, the family, 26
 Kars, 194
 Kaval, 153
 Kazanlik, visit to rose gardens of, 109, 121
 Kemal, Mustapha 188, 189, 199, 200
 His difficulties, 189-191
 Supported by army, 191
 Kendeffy, Count, visit to, 93
 Kibla, 166
 Kiss, Monsieur de, 89-91
 His opinion on treatment of Hungarians, 89, 90
 His pact with Roumanian Government, 91
 His visit, 89-91
 Kolysek, Dr., visit to, 281 *et seq.*
 Kommadine quelle, 232
 Konjica, 231
 Koran, 166, 198
 Korosvolgy, 53, 54
 Kossuth Hymn, 220
 Kovacs restaurant, 26, 27
 Kretz, Professor, 299 *et seq.*
 Ku Klux Klan, 233
 Kunovice, 300 *et seq.*
 Kurds, 180

LACROMA ISLAND, 241, 242

Land Reform, Roumania, 75, 76
 Czecho Slovakia, 294 *et seq.*
 Latin alphabet in Turkey, 197
 Lausanne, Treaty of, 192
 League of Nations, 21, 215, 258
 Leander, Tower of, 161
 Liechtenstein, 297
 Lipovan sect, 59, 60
 Little Entente, 52, 262
 Loretto, Church of, 278
 Loti, Pierre, 161, 200

Love-making in Roumania, 102, 103
 Luther, 277

MACAULAY, 289

Macedonia, 109, 145, 148
 Macedonian comitadji, 148
 Macedonian revolutionary organisation, 149, 150
 Madrassa, 189
 Mahomet, II., 179
 Maktab, 189
 Mala Braca, 240
 Manados, 197
 Manole, legend concerning, 104, 105
 Marabouts, 168
 Marcovic, Monsieur, 218, 219
 Margaret Island, 30
 Marie, Queen of Roumania, 63, 71, 86, 177, 242, 243
 Her accomplishments, 82, 83
 Her beauty and charm, 81-83,
 Her collections and hobbies, 83, 85, 86
 Her opinion of King George, 85
 Her opinion of Venizelos, 85
 Her popularity, 83
 Her share in the War, 82
 Visit to her castle, 79 *et seq.*
 Marinkovic, Monsieur, 149
 Federal system of, 255
 Marko, 152
 Marmara, Sea of, 165, 169
 Marriages, Hungarian, 32-39
 Masaryk, President, interview with, 286 *et seq.*
 His attitude towards communism, 289
 His greatness of character, 286-289
 His preferences, 289 *et seq.*
 Medjellé, 189
 Meredith, 290
 Mestrovic, 242
 Metkovic, 231
 Mezohegyes, 43
 Mezokovesd, Hungarian weddings at, 32-39, 306
 Miljacka, 227
 Minarets, 178
 Mirkvicka, 118
 Mitylene, 196
 Modra, 304
 Moldau, 273
 Moldavia, 273
 Monarchical feeling in Hungary, 22
 Monarchy, new spirit of, 250
 Monks, Roumanian, 71, 72
 Bulgarian, 123-134
 Rigid fasting of, 72, 127

- Monte Carlo, 236
 Moravia, 8
 Moreni, oil wells at, 67
 Moscow, intrigues of, 144
 Mostar, 230-235
 Bridge of, 233
 Costumes of, 233
 Eastern character of, 232
 Excursion to sources of Buna, 234, 235
 Muhammed VI., 157
 Munich, 74
 Murat, Monsieur, 243
 Music, Bulgarian, 114, 115
 Hungarian, 27
 Russian, 218-221
 Slovak, 281-284
 Musical instruments, Bulgarian, 115, 153
 Hungarian, 38
 Roumanian, 106
 Serbian, 212
 Slovak, 282
 Musulman women, 198-200
- NAGYSITKE, LADISLAUS KISS DE,**
 Abbot of Mezokovesd, 34
 His hospitality, 34, 35
 Napoleon, 246
 Narenta Valley, 231
 Necromancy, symbol of, 79
 Negru, Radu, 104, 105
 Legend concerning, 104, 105
 Neuilly, Treaty of, 145
 New diplomacy, 247
 Newton, Lord, on Hungary, 54
 Ninchitch, Monsieur, 208
 Nuremberg, 74
- OIL WELLS OF ROUMANIA, 64-69, 94**
 Old Harem, 176
 Olympus, 169
 Opera House, performance at Cluj, 91-93
 Oradea Mare, 53, 98
 Orient express, King Boris and the, 138
 Osmanli, House of, 171
 Our Lady in Chains Church, 275
- PACIC, MONSIEUR, 208, 242, 253**
 Palacky, 288
 Palocz, 306
 Pandours, 129
 Paprikas, 27, 34
 Parkany, 52
 Paris, 60, 61, 158
 Pavlova, Anna, 302
- Peasant artists of Bulgaria, 307
 Hungary, 306 *et seq.*
 Roumania, 307
 Slovakia, 299-305
 Yugo Slavia, 307
 Pera, 158, 162, 163, 177, 180-182, 186
 Pernik, 124
 Persia, 157
 Pest in Constantinople, 162
 Petrini, 145
 Pirot, 209
 Plato, 286
 Ploesti, 66, 96
 Visit to oil wells at, 66
 Poincaré, Monsieur, and King Alexander, 248
 Polna trial, 287
 Polygamy, abolition of, 189, 199
 Powder Gate, Prague, 276
 Prague, 30, 273-280
 Architecture of, 274-279
 Baroque tendencies in, 276-279
 Charm of, 273, 279
 Gothic style of, 274-276
 Prahova, oil wells at, 96
 Prasek, Monsieur, and Masaryk, 288, 289
 Press association interview with, 146
 Prilep, 152
 Prinkipo Islands, 165, 169, 177
 Prinsepp, 226, 227
 Murder of Archduke, 227
 Privicvic, Monsieur, 257
 Prohibition in Turkey, 194
 Protogueroff, 148
- QUEEN OF SERBIA, 207, 208**
 Queen of Sheba, performance of, 91, 92
 Queen's rôle, 81-84
- RADEFF, SIMEON, 182-187**
 House hunting in Constantinople with, 182-187
 Radic, 229, 251
 Arrest and trial of, 256, 257
 Ascendency of, 251, 252
 Attacks king, 256
 Incoherence of, 251
 Shortsighted policy of, 256
 Visit to Russia, 252
 Ragusa, *see* Dubrovnic
 Regat, 22
 Regional autonomy scheme, 149
 Remus, 62
 Renaissance art in Prague, 276, 277
 Republicans of Croatia, 252
 Rhodope Mountains, 123
 Rila River, 124

- Rilo Monastery, 71, 123-134, 159
 Church of, 128, 129
 Dangerous journey to, 123 *et seq.*
 Ikons of, 131
 Kitchen of, 131
 Pandour of, 129, 134
 Pilgrims of, 131
 Sheep dogs at, 133, 134
 Visit to Hermit, 131-134
- Rilo Plannina, 124
- Riza, 194
- Rizvanbegovic, Ali Pasha, 234
- Romulus, *see* Remus
- Roumania, 8, 21, 52, 57-106
- Roumanian acting, 92, 93
 Corruption, 74, 76, 316 *et seq.*
 Costumes, 61, 79, 84, 101, 102, 307
 Dancing, 77, 79, 80, 86
 Diversity of Laws, 96
 Embroideries, 66, 83, 84, 307
 Folk-lore and customs, 83, 100-106, 284
 Frontiers, 57
 Funeral customs, 103
 Grain lands, 95
 Hospitality and charm, 62
 Legends, 103, 105, 106
 Love of France, 67, 68
 Military strength, 57
 Mining Law, 95-97
 Monsieur Bratiano on the law, 95-97
 Monasteries, 70-72
 Morality, 59-62
 Officers, 58, 60
 Habit of taking rouge, 60
 Oil, 57, 64, 69, 95, 96
 Oil workers, 69
 Peasant artists, 83, 84
 Peasant houses, 101
 Physique, 102
 Resources, 57, 95, 97
 Restaurants, 62, 88
 Sense of humour, 62, 63
 Superstitions, 103, 104, 106
 Trains, 66, 68
 Treatment of Minorities, 78, 84, 88-90, 98, 99, 316 *et seq.*
 Weddings, 102, 103
 Women, 59-61, 312 *et seq.*
- Rousseau, Jean Jacques, 282
- Roustouk, 110-113
- Russian emigrés, 218-220
 Music, 218-221
 Restaurants, 218-221
- Ruzomberok, 281
- SABAC, BATTLE OF, 246
- St. Agatha, 278
- St. Anna, 279
- St. Appolina, 278
- St. Elisabeth, 279
- St. John de Mathis, 279
- St. John of Nepocumene, 279
- St. Litgardis, 279
- St. Philip of Neri, 275
- St. Roch, 275
- St. Stephen Church, 23, 28, 29
- St. Teresa, 275, 278
- St. Venceslaus, 274, 275
- St. Vilgefortis, 278
- St. Vitus, 274
- Salep, taste of, 224, 225
- Salonika, 157, 196, 264
- Samovilas, 152
- Samsoun, 196
- San Biago, 239
- San Stefano, Treaty of, 109
- Sarajevo, 213, 215, 222-229
 Bazaars of, 223
 Costumes of, 224, 226
 Dervishes of, 228, 229
 Eastern atmosphere of, 223-225, 228
 Markets of, 224
 Metal work of, 226
 Moslems of, 224
 Mosques of, 225
 Museum of, 225, 226
 Selamluk at, 225
- Satu Mare, 53
- Saxons, Transylvanian, 74-77.
- Scutari, 161, 165, 177
- Sebenico, 264
- Selamluk, 169-171, 225
- Seraglio, point of, 169
- Serai, Old, visit to, 176, 177
- Serbia, 8, 203-269
 British ignorance with regard to, 229
 Splendid market for British, 229
- Serbian agricultural wealth, 263
 Attitude towards women, 209, 210
 Carpets, 209, 211, 212
 Costumes, 213, 241, 307
 Land Reform, 203
 Musical instruments, 212
 Scenery, 230, 232
 Soldiers, 214, 215, 246
 Trains, 222
- Serbs, Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, 203-266
- Sergio, Mount, 236
- Shakespeare, 282
- Sicilian actors, 91
- Simeria, junction, 93
- Simon, Monsieur, and King Alexander, 248, 249

- Sinaia, visit to, 70-72, 79
 Sinclair, May, 290
 Sindbad the sailor, 49
 Slaveikoff, 152
 Slavovitza, 142
 Slovak Art compared with other
 peasant arts, 306, 307,
 Character, 269, 292
 Domestic art, 300 *et seq.*
 Embroideries, 284, 300, 302, 303
 Folk music, 281-284
 Instruments, 282
 Land Reform, 295-298
 Love-making, 284
 National costumes, 301 *et seq.*
 Paintings, 284
 Peasant artists, 299-305
 Peasant party, 284, 285, 291
 Pottery, 304, 305
 Songs, 282-284
 Wedding costumes, 305
 Slovakia, 8, 21, 22, 26, 52, 269
 Feeling for the Czechs, 269, 270,
 291-294
 Land Reform in, 295-298
 Preference for Hungary, 269, 294
 Smailaga, Cemalovic, Mayor of
 Mostar, 234
 Smetana, 282
 Smyrna, 195, 196
 Snednagora Hills, 120
 Sofia, 110, 116-119, 159
 Opening of Parliament at, 138
 Royal Palace at, 138
 Sofia, Aga, 158, 178
 Soviets, 143, 144, 220
 Spalato, 264
 Stamboul, 158, 160, 161, 165, 169,
 181
 Stambuliski, 135, 136, 140-143
 And the King of Bulgaria, 136
 Stanhebel, Maria, 305
 Stepanovic, Stepan, 207
 Stjapangrad, 234
 Stoyadinovic, Monsieur, Budget of,
 265
 Strahof, 275
 Strobar, 293
 Sublime Porte, 162, 178, 182
 Suliman the Magnificent, 178
 Sun and Moon, Legend concerning,
 105, 106
 Sylvester, Pope, 28
 Syria, 194
 Szecheniji family, 26
 Szegenylegnyek robbers, 47

 TATRA MOUNTAINS, 53
 Temesvar, 53

 Tihon, 47-49
 The church, 49
 The echo, 49
 The monastery, 47
 The old abbot, 48, 49
 The royal apartments, 48, 49
 Tohanulnow, gypsies at, 79, 80, 86
 Tokay, wine, 35
 Tolstoi, President Masaryk on, 287
 Toroczko, 73
 Town Hall, Prague, 276
 Trajan, Emperor, 101
 Transylvania, 8, 21, 22, 28, 54, 57,
 84
 Transylvanian Alps, 79
 Costumes, 73, 79
 Party, 91
 Travelling in Serbia, 230-232
 Trbovlie, 263
 Trebevic Mount, 222, 223
 Trianon, Treaty of, 21
 Tsankoff, Monsieur, and the revolu-
 tion against Stambulisky,
 142, 143
 Tsarska Bistritza, 138
 Visit to King Boris' hunting
 lodge, 138, 139
 Tsrstevo, 263
 Tuka, Monsieur, 284, 294
 Turco Greek War, 245
 Turkey, 157-200
 Turkish Baths, 183
 Bazaars, 172-175
 Cafés, 180
 Character, 157, 174, 175
 Corruption, 162-164, 193, 318
 et seq.
 Cruelty to Serbian women, 213
 Doctors, 162-164
 Exchange of populations, 195
 196
 Finances, 192
 Hatred of foreigners, 192-195
 Houses, 182-185
 Mosques, 178, 179
 Nationalists, 188
 Reforms, 188, 189, 197
 Religious orders, 189, 190
 Roughs and British cemeteries,
 193
 Venereal diseases, 196, 197
 Women, 198-200, 314

 UGRON, 91
 Upraka, 284
 Usref Beg, 225

 VARNA, 159, 160
 Vaynory, 305

Veil, disappearance of, 189, 198, 199
 Venizelos, 85, 146
 Versecz, 53
 Verzer, Professor, 45
 And the regeneration of Hungary,
 46
 Veszprem, 47
 Vofely, best man, 36, 39
 Importance of, 36
 Volga boat song, 210, 220
 Volkoff, General, conversations with
 140-146
 His part in revolution of June,
 141-143
 Vysehrad, 276

WALDSTEIN, 297
 Wallachia, 105
 Weddings, Hungarian, 33, 34
 White Mountain, Battle of, 276
 Women of Bulgaria, 314
 Czecho Slovakia, 311
 Greece, 313

Women—*Continued.*

Hungary, 31, 312
 Roumania, 59-61, 312 *et seq.*
 Turkey, 198-200, 314
 Yugo Slavia, 206, 207, 240, 241,
 313 *et seq.*

YABLONITZKI, MONSIEUR, 294
 Young Turk movement, 190
 Yugo Slavia, 203-269. (*See also*
 "Serbia.")
 Army of, 214, 215, 246
 Beverages of, 224, 225
 Costumes of, 213, 224, 226
 Economic condition of, 261-266
 Financial condition of, 262-265, 266
 Industries of, 263, 264,
 Parties in, 255
 Railway system of, 263-265
 Trains in, 222, 230-232
 Women of, 206, 207, 240, 241, 313

ZAGREB, 252

Itinerary of Journey

