

**THE BALKANS FROM WITHIN**



A SHOOTING PARTY.

# THE BALKANS FROM WITHIN

By  
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**DEDICATED**  
**(WITHOUT PERMISSION)**  
**TO THE ASHES OF THE BERLIN TREATY**

## PREFACE

COUNT GOLUCHOWSKI, replying recently to the pertinent question of a delegate, said that it is impossible to foresee all contingencies in [the] Balkans. The war now in progress in the Far East gives point to his remark, for it introduces additional complications, and lends to Balkan affairs a more immediately threatening aspect. One sign of the times is the candid decision of Austria-Hungary to send troops to Macedonia. There can be little doubt that secret treaties exist, and that, at the first sign of fighting, Austria will receive a European mandate to move. For this she is openly and busily preparing, but the first step—the complete occupation of the Sandjak of Novibazar—is likely to result in a serious surprise. I am fully convinced that the Albanians will see in the occupation of Mitrovitza a threat against their national independence. Indeed, the news from Albania at the moment of writing tells of serious fighting between the insurgents and their old friend Shemshi Pacha. The proposed reforms apparently do not meet with Albanian approbation, and the armed bands are signifying the same in their usual unmistakable manner.

The Scriptures testify abundantly that the lot of a prophet is not a happy one : to him often falls the portion of Micaiah,

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the bread of affliction and the water of affliction, with shrewd blows from those who desire the pleasant lie rather than the unpalatable truth. However, in spite of these terrifying instances, the student of Balkan affairs is not to be denied the pleasure of prophecy ; though I admit that the continual insistence upon what is " going to happen " in the Near East becomes annoying to the average man, who loves a fight, and wishes in his heart of hearts during the weary weeks of prophecy and conjecture, that the war of words would cease and the war of weapons begin. On the other hand, the writer who continuously predicts a war is generally accused of striving to bring it about, and many indignant epithets are hurled at his unlucky head.

In some of the following pages I have argued that this year will see a blaze in the Balkans that will have far graver results than the conflict in the Far East. I cannot see how a war between Turkey and Bulgaria can be avoided. Hilmi Pacha's proposal to place round the whole Bulgarian frontier a cordon of sentries at intervals of not more than a hundred yards, with the corresponding supports and reserves, cannot fail to bring about an upheaval. The most trifling incident will set Turk and Bulgar at each other's throat. In the twinkling of an eye a dozen nations will find themselves directly or indirectly involved, and then will be seen the value of the secret treaties mentioned above. But enough of croaking.

The greater part of this volume is occupied with an endeavour to conjure up rough pictures of life amongst the sturdy and warlike inhabitants of certain Balkan States. These sketches

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represent travels which have occupied the last few years, and which, I hope, will occupy many a year to come—for there are few countries which offer so much of human interest and novelty as these on the threshold of the civilized world. The beauty of the glorious mountains of Rilo, the grandeur of the Albanian Alps, and the wildness of the rocky fastnesses of little Montenegro never fail of their fascination; moreover, the peasant of the Balkans, be he Albanian or Serb, Montenegrin or Bulgar, is hospitality personified, and his full-blooded energy is a pure delight to those who are weary of the Western detrimental. We are apt to judge these people harshly at times, and condemn them for actions of which they in their lonely homes know little or nothing. A sojourn in their midst is a revelation. For my part I love the Balkan people, and so I have tried in these pages to show them in their habit as they live, believing that the reader's comprehension of Balkan problems will be materially increased if he can be made to feel at home among the inhabitants of these remote and turbulent countries.

Many of the sketches found a temporary resting-place in the magazines, and I wish to thank the editors of *Blackwood's*, *Chambers's*, and *Temple Bar* for permission to republish contributions to their pages. Many thanks are also due to Mr. George Sampson for his assistance in preparing the volume for the press. Some errors may have crept into the text, and for these I beg the reader's indulgence, pleading] in extenuation the distance between author and printing press.

I have met with much kindness from Prince Nicolas of



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Montenegro, as well as from General Petroff, the Prime Minister of Bulgaria. In Macedonia the consuls of various nations made life bearable during a trying time, and, in fact, without their support much of my work would have been impossible. For obvious reasons I refrain from mentioning the names of these brave and steadfast men ; and I fervently trust that the gloomy fate which is ever before their eyes may finally be averted.

Lastly, I dedicate this book, with all respect, to the ashes of the Berlin Convention, which has brought so much misery and suffering to brave and innocent races, basely deserted by the very Powers who solemnly undertook to succour them. It is sad indeed when we see humanity and fairness sacrificed on the unholy altar of party politics. England, at any rate, should be above such things.

R. W.

VIENNA, *February*, 1904.

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