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SERBIA

BY L. F. WARING, B.A. (T.C. DUBLIN)

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SERBIA

BY

L. F. WARING

B.A. (TRINITY COLLEGE, DUBLIN)

WITH A PREFACE BY

JOVAN M. JOVANOVITCH

SERBIAN MINISTER IN LONDON

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PREFACE

DEAR MISS WA_____,

The peaceful agricultural and pastoral ancestors of the Southern Slavs of to-day, who in the sixth and seventh centuries peopled the soil between the Alps, the Carpathians and the Balkans, and between the Ægean and the Adriatic Seas, could not imagine that they, in leaving the land to their posterity, would leave with it the uninterrupted struggle for existence which has lasted till to-day, and which became the main characteristic of their history. From the time the Serbs and the other Southern Slav tribes came to the Balkans in the sixth century, they never ceased to fight, first for their unity and independence, later for their liberation. As they were surrounded by nations desirous of conquest—Greeks, Bulgarians, Germans and Magyars, Venetians—and as their territory was the chief bridge connecting the West and the Near East, the Serbs had to fight constantly all through the centuries. In the fourteenth century, just when they were about to live their own life, the great Turkish “Western Push” began unexpectedly. The Serbs

resisted as much as they could until they lost their independence. For five centuries under Turkish rule they continued to struggle for their existence, and at the beginning of the nineteenth century they succeeded in liberating part of their nation and in creating again one bit of independent territory. But the next hundred years were spent in constant fighting in order to defend the freedom of the little state which was now threatened from other quarters, especially by the "Eastern Push," the "Drang nach Osten" of the Germans, of which the consequences can be seen to-day. -

In your book you have put before the British public very clearly these main lines of Serbian history and pointed out the reasons for the eternal warring of a peaceful people. I question whether I can add anything to the vivid picture you give. If you want me, all the same, to write some lines of introduction to the result of your studies of the Serbian question, in which I admire the originality of your conception and your independence of judgment, permit me to underline the facts which led to the immediate causes of the present war.

From the Berlin Congress of 1878 till the 26th of July, 1914, practically the whole policy of Serbia records her hard struggle for independence—economic, financial, moral and intellectual—against Austria-Hungary, who wanted to make Serbia a dependency of the

Central Powers. At the Berlin Congress, Russia, who up to that time had given military assistance to Serbia, being unable to help herself, advised Serbia to come to an agreement with Austria-Hungary. This advice was taken, and Austria-Hungary consented to aid Serbia. In return for her diplomatic assistance she demanded the separation of Serbia from Montenegro, she forced Serbia to build railways towards Salonica and Constantinople, and to give up to her the Danube below the Iron Gates in order that she might have facilities for shipping; she also forced upon Serbia a commercial treaty which in truth was nothing less than a Customs Union. The Serbian Government of that day, being in difficulties, had to accept and sign the Treaty of the 25th June, 1878. In this way Serbia became independent of Turkey, receiving some new territory; but, on the other hand, Austria occupied Bosnia and Herzegovina and closed all exits from Serbia to the seas—the Black Sea, the Ægean, and the Adriatic. (Besides Switzerland, Serbia was—before the war—the only country in Europe without a coastline.) When the Serbian Parliament refused to give its sanction to this convention, Austria-Hungary demanded the resignation of the Government and succeeded in getting a new Serbian Government appointed, whose Foreign Minister in 1881 renounced Bosnia and Herzegovina and also the right to conclude commercial treaties with

other countries without the consent of Austria-Hungary. The result of all this was a very strong reaction in Serbia against Austro-Hungarian influence, and this reaction brought about extremely difficult internal conditions and provoked crises which sometimes darkened the otherwise bright newer history of the Serbian people. Austria-Hungary, backed by Germany, would not for a moment give up any part of her programme with regard to the Near East—a programme which was outlined by Count Bismarck after Sadowa. In 1896 her provocative behaviour constrained the only Austrophil party which ever existed in Serbia—the Progressive—to disband its members, and in 1903 it was this attitude of Austria-Hungary which brought about the catastrophe of one of the Serbian dynasties. The Serbian people, who continuously tried to find a *modus vivendi* with Austria-Hungary, found this to be impossible, and at last there was practically no man in Serbia in favour of a friendly policy towards Austria-Hungary.

In practice, the policy of Austria-Hungary from 1881 to just before the war consisted in doing all in her power to obtain control of Serbian commerce, finance, shipping on the Danube and Save, and the railways. In 1881 and 1893 she forced Serbia to accept commercial treaties which gave her, in effect, the mastery of Serbian imports and exports. By these two treaties, and the various conventions between the two countries in regard to

water communication on the Danube and Save, consular affairs, tribunals, extradition and railways, Austria-Hungary aimed at controlling the economic resources of Serbia. Under the terms of those treaties and conventions Serbia was obliged to export her products exclusively to Austria-Hungary, and to import from that country only all the manufactured goods she needed (five-sixths of her entire imports were Austrian), and even to pay taxes to Austria on her own territory—though there were shipping facilities on the Danube to the Black Sea and railways between Belgrade and Salonica and Constantinople. Serbia's request to join up her railways with those in Bosnia was refused by Austria, and Serbia had to give up the building of a railway connection with Rumania at Turn Severin on the Danube because Austria did not approve of it. In 1891, when Serbia started the question of an international railroad which would connect the Danube with the Adriatic near Durazzo in Albania, the plan was most strongly opposed by Austria-Hungary.

This state of affairs went on for more than thirty years. All attempts to improve it were unsuccessful. Austria-Hungary became more and more aggressive, her demands excessive. The Serbian ruler who tried to persuade the people to agree to these demands had to give up the attempt, and in 1905 Serbia at last opposed them openly and began to fight for

her economic independence. In this year a new treaty was to be concluded with Austria-Hungary, who, amongst other things, desired that Serbia should make her state purchases, especially of railway material, chiefly in Austria, and that guns should be procured only from the factory of Skoda & Co. Serbia declared herself willing to buy up to 23,000,000 francs worth of railway material in Austria, but would not agree to buying her guns there. Upon this, Austria closed the frontier to Serbian exports and a Customs war began between the two countries. As is known, this fight ended not unfavourably for Serbia, but it was never forgiven by Austria. From that time the latter's policy was directed more or less openly against Serbia. In 1913, Austria, together with Germany, purchased secretly the majority of the shares of the Oriental Railway Company in the Balkans, with the intention of getting into her own hands the control of that part of the line which was on Serbian territory—though it was obviously against the most elementary notions of state sovereignty.

Besides the evident injustice of the demand for the monopoly of salt, and of armaments and railways in Serbia, Austria-Hungary made other demands, amongst which the most interesting related to Serbian school books. They demanded the omission from these books of all references to Serbs, Croats and Slovenes as one and the same people

living not only in Serbia, but also in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Hungary, Croatia, Dalmatia, Istria and the Slovene lands in Austria; further, of all passages in the books in which were described the attempts of the Serbs and Croats to obtain liberty to use their own language and name, and to achieve the union of their people. These demands were made by the Austro-Hungarian Government in spite of the fact that there existed numbers of old documents of the Austrian emperors and Hungarian kings, which proved what the Serbs affirmed, and also many Austrian laws and regulations treating of these matters; the Austrian Emperor, for instance, even to-day, has the title of the Serbian Voivode, and at the Hungarian millennium in 1896 the Magyars carried amongst their own flags the national Serbian flag. In Hungarian and Austrian school books, Serbs, Croats and Slovenes are described as one nation, just as in Rumanian school books Transylvania is referred to as a country populated by Rumanians, and in Italian school books parts of Austria as Italian.

The political situation was similar. The whole foreign policy of Serbia during the last century was based on the principle, "The Balkans for the Balkan nations." Serbia constantly tried to come to an agreement on this basis with other Balkan nations, whilst Austria-Hungary—especially from 1878, when she received at the Berlin Congress the

mandate to occupy Bosnia and Herzegovina—did her best to prevent it. Serbia, for instance, concluded three political treaties with Bulgaria (in 1897, 1904 and 1912), and one Customs Union (in 1905). These four treaties were of a purely defensive character and only in the interests of the independence of the Balkan nations, but Austria-Hungary succeeded in breaking them.

In 1912, an agreement took place between Serbia, Montenegro, Bulgaria and Greece, which was crowned by an alliance for defence of the principle, "The Balkans for the Balkan nations." When the Young Turks, by their attempts to turkicise the Christian population of European Turkey, brought about war with these four countries, the results obtained by Serbia raised her high in the estimation of her unfreed co-nationalists in Austria-Hungary, but increased at the same time the antagonism of Austria. During the war with Turkey, Austria made four different attempts to attack Serbia. The first was in November 1912, the reason given being the well-known affair of the Austrian Consul Prohaška in Prizren. The second was in 1913, in consequence of the conquest of Scutari. The third attempt was in August 1913—after, and in consequence of, the Treaty of Bucarest. The fourth attempt was in September 1913, on the pretext of the "Strategical points" in Albania. At last, in 1914, as is known to everybody, she attacked Serbia.

The deeper reasons for the irreconcilable antagonism of Austro-Hungarian diplomacy towards Serbia and of their feeling that Serbia was in their way, which hastened the above course of events, are to be found not least in Serbia's methods of government, which were likely to provoke comparisons unfavourable to the Dual Monarchy. Whilst the Serbs in Serbia had all political rights—just in the same way as the British—their co-nationals, the Serbo-Croats and Slovenes in Austria-Hungary were without many of them, and even without many civil rights. In Serbia, everybody was equal in the eyes of the law; no one could be deprived of his freedom, or be tried, or have his house searched without the decision of a regular tribunal; no one could be exiled, or have his goods confiscated; all religions were free, and the education of children was obligatory, and free of expense, even in the Secondary Schools and the Universities. The press in Serbia was entirely independent—perhaps too much so; the citizens were guaranteed freedom of assembly and discussion. In Serbia, the Government was formed of men who had the confidence of the national representatives; the King could not adjourn Parliament for more than two months during a session, and in the case of dissolution he had to convoke a new election at the latest two months after. The elections for Parliament (the Skupshtina) were direct and the voting secret; every Serbian citizen

who was twenty-one years of age and who paid at least fifteen francs yearly in rates, had the vote. Without the decision of Parliament no law could be passed or revoked, and the State could not be charged with debts, nor could new taxes be introduced. In opposition to all this, in Austria-Hungary the German and the Magyar minorities have an overwhelming power as regards political and civil rights, over the non-German and non-Magyar nations, who are looked upon as "citizens of the second class." As to the Serbo-Croats and Slovenes in Austria-Hungary, it can only be said that they are constantly living under exceptional laws, and that they are being governed systematically with a view to being germanised or magyarised. So it was quite natural that they should look with hope and desire towards the free land in which many of them, as naturalised Serbian citizens, came to the highest positions. When Serbia was enlarged after the wars with Turkey and Bulgaria, she became automatically and definitely the point of attraction for all Serbo-Croats and Slovenes who were anxious to unite in one independent and free state where everybody could live a full, individual life. Thus the Serbian struggle for independence attained, as it seemed, the last stage, and Austria-Hungary decided in the year 1914 definitely to attempt to crush Serbia by force of arms in order to open for Germany once and for all the way to the Near East, and so

ACE

xv

fulfil the Pan-German plan of a Mittel-Europa
(Central Europe) and Germanic world domina-
tion from Hamburg to the Persian Gulf.

Believe me,

Yours, etc.,

JOV. M. JOVANOVITCH.

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NOTE ON SPELLING OF NAMES OF PERSONS, ETC.

SERBIAN names of persons, etc., in this book are spelt, for practical reasons, in the English way. The Serbo-Croatian Latin characters, which in some cases differ from the Western European ones, have been transcribed according to English pronunciation.

The *national* names of towns in South Slav countries have been introduced, as they are the only ones used by the inhabitants. The foreign names which in several instances have been adopted by Western Europe chiefly from German sources are added in brackets, and have references in the Index.

In the reconstructed Europe the South Slavs must find their own, and unite as they have long wished to unite. But in these questions a little knowledge is a dangerous thing, and it is well that diplomats should realise that a repetition of the ignorance displayed at the Congress of Berlin in 1878 may plunge a future generation into another world war.

Public opinion is to be created by the man in the street. But, unfortunately, of international politics he knows little or nothing. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that in the past he might almost have believed that they had no conceivable connection with himself. He can never again think along such lines. The misfortunes of one country are the misfortunes of the world, and, conversely, "No European people can pass from misfortune to prosperity without all European people profiting by the change."

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