

EUROPEAN SOBRIETY IN THE PRESENCE OF THE BALKAN CRISIS

From that fateful September of 1683 when Sobieski beat the Turks back from the walls of Vienna and exultantly announced that the approaches to the town, the camp, and the open fields were covered with the corpses of the enemy, down to the bloody days of Sebastopol and Plevna, the Sultan's territorial interests west of the Bosphorus have been a standing menace to the peace of Europe. Again and again in the eighteenth century, the Eastern powers were engaged in desperate conflicts to wrest ever larger areas from the grip of the Turk, and before the century had closed the Western powers as well were drawn into the contest. They assisted at the formation of the independent kingdom of Greece and narrowly escaped a serious clash when the Sultan defied them. In 1854, on a pretext that seems criminally trivial (whatever may have been the real motives) England, France, Turkey, Sardinia, and Russia plunged into the terrible Crimean War whose horrors at Malakoff and the Redan, gave a dash of bitterness to "the brazen glories" of Inkermann and the Light Brigade. In 1877, Alexander II, using the call of Bulgaria as a pretext, threw his troops across the border and they were cutting their way through to the Sultan's capital when they were checked by a solemn warning from England that the settlement of the Turk's estate down to the minutest detail was a matter of European interest. Recalling, perhaps, the disasters of the Crimea, the victorious Tsar yielded

as gracefully as possible, and at the memorable Berlin Conference of 1878, the representatives of Great Britain, Russia, Germany, France, Austria, Italy, and Turkey drafted what has been called "the fundamental law of Southeastern Europe," establishing the status of Bulgaria, Eastern Roumelia, Crete, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia, Roumania, and Macedonia. With the exception of the union of Bulgaria and Eastern Roumelia in 1885 the grand settlement reached at Berlin has remained substantially undisturbed, each nation fearing that the slightest jar might easily bring down the whole structure so painfully erected, and precipitate a disastrous conflict among the powers interested. Even the apparently harmless attempts of the Cretans to unite with Greece were several times repressed by military demonstrations on the part of the powers entrusted with the task of guarding the peace of the Southeast.

Suddenly in the summer and autumn of this year (1908) there occurred a series of startling events which, in the days of Napoleon III and Disraeli, would certainly have afforded acceptable pretexts for a general armed conflict. In July, the Young Turk party in Constantinople was able to force the Sultan to approve the restoration of the suspended constitution of 1876 and thus reconstruct the government of Turkey. On October 5, Prince Ferdinand declared at Tirnovo, amid great rejoicing, the freedom and independence of Bulgaria from Turkish suzerainty. Two days later came the official proclamation of Austria-Hungary an-

nexing the provinces of Bosnia and Herzegovina which the treaty of Berlin had placed under the administration of the dual monarchy. Before the diplomats of Europe could catch their breath, the Cretans announced their emancipation from Constantinople and their final union with Greece. It seemed that Turkey had committed political suicide, that respect for law and order was being cast to the winds, and that the hour had come for a general scramble in which the strongest might hope for a lion's share.

The war spirit at once flamed up in Europe and for a time it looked as if hasty action on the part of some minor power in the Southeast might bring on a local conflict whose larger implications could scarcely be apprehended. The king of Servia at once signed a decree ordering the mobilization of the first reserves of the army numbering about 35,000 and his call to arms was greeted with great enthusiasm. Crowds in Belgrade, shouting "Long live our Bosnia! Down with Austria!" attacked the Austrian legation. The mayor of Belgrade presided over a meeting of 25,000 persons at which members of parliament indulged in the most violent war talk and were greeted with shouts of "On to the Drina to save our brothers! To arms! To arms!" The Servian Crown Prince addressing the soldiers clamoring for war declared, "For him who would die, I wish life; for him who would live, I wish death." The Servian newspapers published inflammatory articles urging the government not to yield, and the Servian parliament on Monday, October 12, voted an extraordinary credit to the minister of war and

passed a resolution that it was willing to support the ministry to the fullest extent in the defense of Servian interests. The *Chargé d'Affaires* representing Servia at London gave out the following statement: "Austria has cynically thrown a bomb into the powder magazine of Europe and it is impossible to foretell to what the indignation of the Servians may lead them. In Servia the matter is one of life or death. To explain the indignation in my country it is necessary to point out that the majority of the population which will now pass under Austrian rule is Servian. . . . Twice Servia has gone to war over the question of Bosnia."

While the excitement in Servia seemed swiftly bearing the population toward war, the Montenegrins joined in the clamor for armed resistance to Austrian aggression. In opening the parliament on Monday, October 12, the Prince declared that his people had suffered a great wrong at the hands of Austria, and were ready to sacrifice their last drop of blood to set matters right if necessary. Parliament promptly passed a vote of confidence in the government and unanimously sanctioned the demand for military supplies.

The European press treated the violation of the Berlin Treaty as a serious event, and some of the more belligerent papers, confidently anticipating war, announced the actual commencement of hostilities between Austria and Servia. The *Paris Journal* declared that the Balkan States "are on the brink of a precipice and the European powers are about to give free rein to their appetite for dominion." The *Petit Parisien* urged, "the chances of war are manifold unless Europe

is sensible enough solemnly to declare that no blood shall be shed." The London *Times* deplored the injury which the action of Austria and Bulgaria had done to the prestige of the new régime in Turkey, and added: "Were that prestige destroyed, the steps taken by these two Christian lands would probably result in plunging Macedonia and other wide regions of Turkey into a welter of blood and rapine more horrible than that from which they have been rescued by the revolution. . . . They must bear the consequences of their acts."

While the papers in Western Europe realized the gravity of the situation, not a single one of weight took advantage of the opportunity for "good journalism" to urge any hasty action inviting even the risk of war. And the governments of all the great nations took a judicial attitude, which conclusively demonstrated their realization of the responsibilities resting upon the power making the first belligerent move. Even the government of Turkey, whose prestige and interests were most seriously affected by the crisis, speedily announced a pacific policy, while making it clear that the offenses committed by Bulgaria and Austria against legitimate rights warranted the use of force. Instead of rushing to arms and calling on the Powers that had signed the Treaty of Berlin to maintain their own public agreements, Turkey appealed to the decision of the contracting parties, and stated that she would "await their decision with calm."

Russia responded to the appeal from Constantinople with a proposition that a conference of the powers

signatory to the Treaty of Berlin should be held, and the contested issues peacefully adjusted by the parties interested. This view of the *impasse* was taken also by Great Britain, France, Italy, and, conditionally, by Germany. Although it is by no means decided that the vexed questions are to be settled by a great conference of the powers, it seems certain that no country is willing to take the huge risk of plunging Europe into war. While the expected conference is being indefinitely delayed, negotiations are proceeding between Turkey and Bulgaria and Austria; the representatives of all countries show an anxiety to reach a peaceful settlement; and a pacific note runs through the propositions and counter-propositions which have thus far found their way to the public. It is hazardous, of course, to prophesy, but if the tone of the European press, the rates of war insurance, and the avowed policy of the most militant of the Powers involved are to be accepted as indications, Europe will escape the threatened war.

It would be unwarranted, however, to conclude that such a happy result has been achieved through the influence of abstract notions of justice and righteousness alone. It would be unwarranted also to assume that material interests alone have been responsible for the cautious reserve which now characterizes the policy of all the powers concerned. In fact, from the standpoint of the advocate of peace, it matters little whether war has been so far prevented by a complex of economic interests, the

fear of war in itself, the unwillingness of statesmen to assume the terrible responsibility for a general conflict, or by a belief in the folly and futility of war. Indeed, no single factor has been responsible for the outcome. If one examines the comments of the European papers on the crisis, the semi-official statements from the respective governments, and the general distribution of interests in Southeastern Europe, he will discover that many elements have entered into the maintenance of peace.

First among the pacific influences must be placed the calm and reasonable attitude of the Constitutional Liberals in Turkey. Instead of attempting to stir the mob spirit by mad appeals for "a holy war on the infidels," in accordance with the vogue once famous in Constantinople, they sought to quiet the unrest of the militant elements among the population. In its note to the powers, the Turkish government stated that it "could resort to force to ensure the protection of its rights, but being above all respectful to treaties and anxious for the common interests involved in the need for peace, it desires to avoid such an extremity." It is well known that members of the Young Turk party have been long in Western capitals studying modern political methods, and also that they have manifested an intense interest in the conferences at the Hague and in the proposed programs for the peaceful adjustment of international disputes. The Constantinople correspondent of the London *Times* telegraphed his paper, when the news of the action of Bulgaria and Austria-Hungary was made known, as

follows: "All Turkish journals publish long leading articles dealing with the situation. Their tone is almost without exception the reverse of Chauvinistic, and an appeal to arms is generally deprecated.... It is pointed out that in spite of the cruel blows dealt to national prestige, the interests of the empire demand a calm and pacific attitude on the part of every section of the population."

A second factor in the maintenance of peace was the clear, firm, and moderate attitude taken by the Liberal government in England. Sir Edward Grey, in a public address delivered soon after the declaration of Bulgarian independence, stated that the Government could not agree to the violation of the treaty until the other powers were consulted, that every effort should be made to prevent the startling events from militating against the reform movement in Turkey, and that the practical and material changes had not been so great as alarmists had contended. The Prime Minister, Mr. Asquith, at the opening of Parliament a few days later, expressed the hope that those interested in reaching an agreement would not precipitate a crisis by hasty action but would continue to show moderation and restraint. The leader of the opposition in the House of Lords stated, "that their one desire was to strengthen the hands of the government in the task of maintaining the public law of Europe and preserving the peace of the world."

In France the press in some quarters declared that only a congress could avert war, but the government showed no anxiety to make capital by assuming a bel-

ligerent attitude. There was no Napoleon III to appeal to the glories of Austerlitz and Wagram, and the ministry, seriously occupied with pressing questions of domestic reform and expedients for meeting already overtopping military expenditures, did not betray the slightest interest in the possibilities of winning fame again at Sebastopol. Things have changed in France since 1854. Doubtless the *Journal des Débats* voiced the sentiments of all sober Frenchmen in the following declaration: "Without neglecting our interests, we should join with our allies and friends in preventing the destruction of the European equilibrium. We ought to see to it that Turkey receives the satisfaction due her, and if war does arise compel a limitation of the conflict and prevent the conflagration from becoming general. Our rôle is that of a peace-maker. Our government should speak firmly; it has all France behind it."

There is no doubt also that the minor powers of Southeastern Europe have learned some lessons during the last twenty-five years. They have taken part in the Hague conferences and are parties to the Hague conventions. They have been devoting their attention with more or less success to the advancement of the arts of peace and industry. They are developing financial and commercial interests which give them pause in the face of the derangement of business that war inevitably engenders. Despite some bluster and unquestionable pressure from the excitable elements of the population, the governments most deeply involved took a studiously pacific attitude after the first impulses were inhibited.

Credit must be given likewise to the ententes now existing between England, France, and Russia. During the period when the crisis was at its height, the negotiations among these powers were conducted with a frankness and cordiality which were undoubtedly facilitated by the previous good understanding. Certainly this may be regarded as an illustration of how friendly relations cultivated assiduously in time of peace may be conducive to judicial calm in critical situations.

Thus a great political revolution has taken place; a general European settlement has been violently overturned; Austria has been guilty of aggression akin to that of Russia in times past; every pretext has been afforded for some militant power to precipitate a conflict; and yet pacific councils have prevailed. High talk about "the glory of France" so characteristic of the Second Empire has been conspicuously absent from the French press. England has found no responsible political leader to emulate the example of the flamboyant Beaconsfield and call for the war dogs to avenge the attack upon "the integrity of Turkey." Everywhere in the voluminous discussions of the upheaval, there is a note of moderation and good sense. Instead of the reckless abandon of old fashioned militarism, there is a sane conservatism born of the clear recognition of the responsibilities assumed by the Power that dares cast the first fire-brand. Surely without undue optimism, this happy escape from the crisis may be deemed a triumph for the cause of peace.

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