

THE SITUATION IN THE EAST.

WHO can foretell what will result from a situation so complicated and so grave as that which we see in the Balkan Peninsula? It is always perilous to play the part of prophet in matters of foreign policy, especially when the final decision must proceed from an autocrat who lives apart from the world, and who can with a single word set in motion at his own will a million of soldiers. *Apropos* of the impossibility of foreseeing events, Prince Bismarck, in one of those long evenings at Versailles during the siege of Paris, told a story which Herr Busch has reported for us in his curious book, "Bismarck und seine Leute." At the moment when the quarrel between Prussia and Switzerland about Neuchâtel seemed likely to lead to war, Bismarck, who was then Prussian representative at the Diet at Frankfort, called on Rothschild and instructed him to sell some stock which he thought would fall if the war broke out. "They are good securities," said Rothschild; "it is a mistake to sell them." "I know what I know," answered Bismarck: "sell." As we know, the Emperor Napoleon intervened, and the question was amicably settled; Bismarck, who thought himself so well informed, sold his stock, and lost on the bargain. "It is the only financial speculation I ever made," he added; "I was a diplomatist, not more stupid than other diplomatists; I thought I was admirably informed, and yet my forecast was entirely contradicted by the event."

So I will not try to predict what the near future may have in store for us. The only task that can be attempted is to disentangle the interests of the different States which are involved in this Eastern imbroglio. First, let us take the Bulgarians. I think I may assert that the good things which I said of them in my book on the Balkan Peninsula have been entirely justified by their conduct

in the face of the stern and terrible trials through which they have just passed. Taken at unawares by a detestable piece of treachery, worthy only of the brigands who infest Macedonia, they rallied round the Prince who had been their leader, and proved their affection and gratitude to him by unmistakable signs. Left to themselves by the forced departure of their Sovereign, they met the intrigues, the threats, and the violence of the Russian agents with firmness, dignity, and prudence. In spite of all the efforts of General Kaulbars to provoke disturbance, order has been maintained down to this moment. The Regency, in strict obedience to the Constitution, has issued orders for elections to the National Assembly, and has replied to the unjustifiable demands and accusations of Russia by notes as dignified as they were unanswerable. We may well hope that the whole Bulgarian people, and especially the officers, will have dignity and patriotism enough to resist all foreign interference and rally to the Government which legitimately represents their country. Both the people and the army showed so much courage and devotion in repelling the Servian invasion that it is reasonable to expect from them similar heroism in opposing any Russian columns which may seek to occupy Bulgaria in the teeth alike of treaty rights and of international law. No doubt they must be beaten in the end. But the Russian troops would have to go by sea; their commissariat would not be an easy matter; and the Bulgarian army might, by purely defensive movements and guerilla warfare, keep up its resistance long enough for some Power to come to its relief. Let us hope that we may be spared the spectacle of this fratricidal struggle.

The policy of Russia has been as clumsy as it possibly could be, and in its later stages it has become absolutely odious. It is to Russia that Roumania, Servia, and Bulgaria are indebted for their freedom; and yet Russia, by her haughty and violent proceedings, has brought it about that all these young States, which owe to her their very existence, have become hostile to her. From 1820 to 1840 Russia acted in Servia precisely as she is acting in Bulgaria to-day, and with the same result. Having forced from Turkey the concession of the semi-independence of Servia, she tried to govern the country according to her own liking, by means of the Ministry and the Prince. The Russian consul gave his orders and the Government had only to obey. But the Servians got tired of being the mere instruments of the foreigner; and opposition soon sprang up, which Russia tried to overcome by all possible methods—by gaining over influential senators to her side, stirring up popular movements, and even compelling the Prince to abdicate and quit Bulgaria. Nothing came of it: the national sentiment proved quite unmanageable. Servia escaped from Russian influence, and in spite of the fact that the recent aggrandisement

of the Principality is due to the generous devotion of the Russian volunteers and soldiers who shed their blood in the valley of the Timok, it is not to St. Petersburg that Prince Milan looks for his instructions.

In the Russian intervention in Bulgarian affairs we see the same inconsistency and the same lack of foresight. Having given to the Bulgarian people their freedom and provided them with a Constitution as liberal as that of Belgium, and more democratic, presently she finds that they prefer to use their newly acquired liberty for the purpose of governing themselves according to their own wishes and needs, and not for the purpose of obeying the commands of the Czar. Forthwith she urges the Prince to a *coup-d'état*, which was effected on the 27th of May, 1881, scarcely two years after the Constitution of Tirnova was promulgated, and before its working could possibly be judged of. The Prince demanded of the Extraordinary Assembly full powers for seven years, and also the right of proposing a revision of the Constitution. The Russian General, Ehrenroott, who was made Minister, managed by means of gendarmes and special commissioners to suppress completely all electoral freedom. The Liberals, hunted like wild beasts, abstained from the polls. The Consul-General of Russia announced the approval of the Czar. Nevertheless, some Liberal deputies were elected; amongst others, M. Balabanoff was returned for Sofia. They were excluded by the President of the Legislative Assembly, the Sobranje. The *régime* which followed was a reproduction of that of December 2 in France—a real despotism hidden under a slight varnish of constitutionalism.

It is a fact very honourable to the Bulgarian character that the superior officials headed the remonstrance, just as was the case in Hesse, at the time of Hassenpflug. Thus, at Sofia, fifty-five of the higher employés, including the President of the Court of Accounts and almost all the heads of Ministerial Departments, members of the Court of Appeal, and Municipal Councillors, signed a petition to the Council of State asking for guarantees against the arbitrary power of the Government. This act of patriotic courage cannot be too much admired.

To ensure the success of the Ministerial candidates at the coming elections, it was necessary to call in the Generals. The Czar saw that the situation had become very embarrassing, and he sent two very able officers—Generals Kaulbars and Soboleff. The elections, again controlled by the military, were everywhere favourable to the Conservatives, the Liberals being compelled to keep away. But Natchovitch, Grecoff, and the Prince himself, soon began a secret contest against the Russian Generals. I have heard many piquant details on this subject. At the Prince's dinners the

Generals came with their aides-de-camp, without waiting for invitations, and at the soirées the Prince pretended not to see them. He was irritated by his Russian Ministers, who considered him as under their protection. They acted like masters, and tried to manage everything in their own way. The Conservative Ministers endeavoured to force them to retreat by exciting opposition against them in the Chamber. It was intimated from St. Petersburg that the mission of Generals Soboleff and Kaulbars would not be completed until MM. Natchovitch and Grecoff had retired.

Much exasperated, these two Ministers pursued the struggle with more bitterness than ever; they even went so far as to join with the Liberals in their effort to compel the Russian Generals to leave the country, whilst the Prince steadfastly refused to receive the latter. Russia, finding that she had made a mistake in favouring the reaction, ordered M. Yonine, the Russian Consul, to compel the Prince to re-establish the Constitution of Tirnova (August, 1883). The Conservatives, seeing that there was no hope of success, did everything to obtain the support of the Liberals. M. Zankoff, but lately proscribed, became the master of the situation. He accepted the power offered to him by Prince Alexander on condition that the Constitution should be obeyed. The Russian Generals, Kaulbars and Soboleff, being left without support, sent in their resignation and left Sofia. The Conservatives, who had brought them, openly rejoiced over their departure, whilst the Radicals showed them the warmest sympathy.

Russia, evicted, manifested her displeasure by recalling two of the Prince's aides-de-camp, without even giving him notice. Deeply wounded, the Prince sent back all the Russian officers of his suite, and recalled the thirty-one Bulgarian officers who were studying in Russia. This was open hostility. M. Balabanoff, the best man to fairly represent Bulgaria, was sent as a delegate to the Czar. He was well received at St. Petersburg, and peace was made. The Emperor recalled Kaulbars, and it was decided that for the future Russian officers in Bulgaria should give their attention exclusively to military matters. To sum up, the result obtained was important. Bulgaria, like Western Roumelia, had definitely escaped from the guardianship of Russia.

Nevertheless, when I visited Bulgaria three years ago the feeling of gratitude towards "Le Czar Libérateur" was still very strong. In the cottages, in the *hans*, in all the public buildings, the portrait of the Emperor hung side by side with that of Prince Alexander, and generally in the more important place. But the attitude taken by Russia upon the question of the union of Bulgaria and Roumelia has estranged all hearts from her. It fills one with surprise and

melancholy to see* with what asperity the Russian Ambassador, at the Conference of Constantinople, opposed the union of the two Bulgarias, a measure unanimously desired by the people, justified by historical, ethnical, geographical and commercial considerations, and admitted in principle from the very outset by Count Kálnoky. Russia alone, to her disgrace, urged Turkey to send troops to occupy Roumelia, at the risk of renewing the Bulgarian atrocities—a step so extreme that it shocked all the Powers, even Turkey herself. Whence came this opposition to a manifestation of the popular will, aiming at the establishment, in part, of that very Bulgaria which Russia had herself mapped out in the Treaty of San Stefano, and had at one moment been prepared to defend even at the risk of a general war? It was an attitude so contrary to the traditional policy of Russia, that the Russians at Philippopolis, at first, and before they had received their instructions, showed themselves favourable to the union movement.

The apologists of Russia—and, amongst them, Madame de Novikoff, one of her most convinced and most eloquent apologists—plead that the Czar was bound to act as he did, lest he should appear in the eyes of Europe as an accomplice in a revolution contrary both to the Treaty of Berlin and to the views which he had recently expressed to his Imperial allies. But it appears from the Blue-Book which I have already quoted† that Count Kálnoky told Sir A. Paget that the Czar was as much taken by surprise by the course of events at Philippopolis as Prince Alexander himself. So that there was no need for the Czar to urge the Turks to re-occupy Roumelia in order to prove that he had not favoured or excited the Roumelian movement, which indeed no well-informed person suspected him of. The truth is, that he was influenced by two feelings, both egoistic, and not easily to be justified.

In the first place, he was profoundly vexed with Prince Alexander because he neither would nor could play the part of a Russian proconsul, yielding passive obedience to the Generals sent to him from St. Petersburg. Secondly, he was beginning to understand that Great Bulgaria, recognized by Europe, supported at last even by the Porte, and now sure of future prosperity and freedom, would certainly escape from the exclusive influence of Russia.

In giving way to these narrow jealousies, the Czar was taking up a policy even less adroit than before. He proved, in contradiction to all the fine speeches of the Moscow Slavophiles about their brethren in the Peninsula, that what Russia had had in view was only to constitute a group of vassal principalities, and not to foster the enfranchisement and autonomous development of the Serbs and

* Blue-Book, Turkey; No. 1, 1886.

† September 22, 1885: 6-19.

Bulgarians. He admitted, by implication, that in creating the Great Bulgaria of the Treaty of San Stefano he had made an enormous blunder, and shown the most palpable want of foresight; for clearly that Bulgaria, being much more powerful, and possessing in a much higher degree the elements of prosperity, would have offered a far more prompt and vigorous resistance to the encroachments of Russia than the Bulgaria of the Treaty of Berlin. And lastly, what was more important, he roused against himself the patriotic feeling of the Bulgarians, and provoked the distrust of Servia, Roumania, and all the Slav peoples of the Peninsula, by showing them that the true object of Russia was simply to subject them to her irresistible will, pending the moment when she should think fit to annex them.

And now what shall I say of recent events; of the conspiracy of Sofia, openly paid for by Russia; of the banishment of the young Prince whose courage and skill were the admiration of Europe; above all, of the mission of General Kaulbars, disputing with the crowd at public meetings, urging the military men and officials to rise against the lawful government of their country, stirring up troops of peasants in order to invalidate the elections on the pretext of disturbances and riots, and returning from his fruitless tour, everywhere bowed out and avoided? No words can adequately depict the series of foolish proceedings of this tragi-comedy, in which the hateful and the ridiculous dispute the supremacy. The net result is that Russia has united against her all parties in Europe—the friends of freedom, because she infringes the liberties of a peaceful, sensible, and industrious people who have won the esteem of every one; the Conservatives, because she has been fomenting insurrections and pronunciamientos; and the partisans of law, because she has taken under her protection the authors of the kidnapping affair at Sofia, men much more guilty than the Russian Nihilists, who, though they resort to abominable methods, are at least striving, at the peril of their own lives, to emancipate their country, while the conspirators who made a night raid on Prince Alexander not only broke their military oath, but betrayed their country for a foreign bribe. Bulgaria has had the splendid advantage, such as also fell to the fortune of Belgium, of having a prince at one with his people, who had led them to victory, and was then in a position to found a national dynasty. In order to satisfy a contemptible spite, Russia has destroyed this element of peace and pledge of a happy future, and, so far as in her lies, has left this young State which she herself created a prey to the unknown, to anarchy, and, it may be, to a crisis which may endanger its very existence.

What will Russia do now? Who can foretell the decree of a ruler, ignorant, unintelligent, ill-informed, as we can only too well

see, and rendered almost imbecile by the voluntary imprisonment to which he is condemned by the incessant conspiracies of his subjects, who are driven to despair by his outrageous severity? The most sensible thing to do would obviously be to draw from General Kaulbars' mission the sound conclusion that the Bulgarians mean to govern themselves, and not to obey orders from St. Petersburg, and to accept this fact, which every one can see. If she is determined to impose her will, she must despatch the Cossacks—a step which might have the gravest consequences. Is she sure that Berlin, which maintains so absolute a reserve, would consent? Would not the Russian army of occupation, which must cross the Black Sea, find its communications cut by the Turkish fleet and the English ironclads? Would it not very soon come into contact with "the Austro-Hungarian sentinel, mounting guard over the Balkans," of whom Lord Salisbury, and, still more recently, Lord Randolph Churchill, has spoken? Besides, the position of Russia in Bulgaria, deprived of the right of sending supplies through Roumania, would be very difficult. She would have to reckon from the outset with the passionate hostility of the country occupied. The Bulgarians, like the Servians, have the instinct of liberty and independence, and it will be long before they are willing to be led like serfs.

Let us consider what would be the probable attitude of the Powers in presence of such an event. There has been much talk lately about the understanding which seemed to be established between Turkey and Russia. The Porte, conscious of the dangers which threaten it on every side, refuses to offend any Power, and will take no step without the concurrence of the States which were parties to the Treaty of Berlin; but it would probably resist a Russian occupation if assured of sufficient support, and for two reasons—first, for fear of losing a province which was on the way to become an ally, as Prince Alexander had proposed; and next, because Russia, well planted at Philippopolis, would be practically master of Constantinople. I do not believe that any promise of *baksheesh* would bring the Sultan voluntarily to submit to such a solution.

As to Austria-Hungary, her policy has been already explained in M. Tisza's remarkable speech to the Hungarian Parliament. She covets no extension of territory in the Balkan Peninsula; she cannot allow any other Power to exercise preponderating influence there; she favours the autonomy of the young States which have so recently sprung up, and would willingly see them federated. This attitude is apparently hostile to the entry of the Russians into Bulgaria. One would have thought that an agreement might have been come to between the two empires which dispute the hegemony of the Balkan Peninsula, the one taking the west, as far as Salonica, and the other the east, as far as Constantinople. But I fancy that the Hungarians,

who are very clear-sighted, would never consent to such a partition. For, first, it would immeasurably increase the Slav element in the dual empire; and secondly, the position of Austria at Salonica would be untenable with Russia at Constantinople, Great Bulgaria on one flank and Montenegro on the other. Austria cannot extend her occupation from Bosnia and Novi-Bazar to the Egean, unless Russia remains within her present frontiers. One of the most eminent of Russian military writers, General Fadéeff, has said that the road from Moscow to Constantinople lay through Vienna; and he was right. Austria must be reduced to impotence before she could allow the Russians to establish themselves permanently on the shores of the Bosphorus.

And, England, what would she do? You are better able to judge than I. But it seems to me that she would support Austria, because it is for her interest to do so. At least that is what Lord Randolph Churchill said very lately; but was he speaking of moral support or of the effective support of the British fleet? I think that England would be drawn into active hostilities, because it would be better worth her while to fight Russia in company with allies on the Continent and on the Black Sea, than to have to attack the Muscovite Colossus alone in the deserts of Central Asia, or the valleys of Afghanistan, as she was ready to do the other day under the Gladstone Cabinet. It has lately been maintained that England might look on a Russian occupation of Constantinople without regret or fear, and even with satisfaction. It is an illusion or a dream. It is the same question as that of Egypt. If England could give up her interest in India, turn her attention to her internal development, and resolve to allow the Suez Canal to pass into the hands of France or Russia, that would be a complete scheme, and would best make for the happiness of the English people. But as in the present state of opinion this policy, however desirable on economic grounds, has not the slightest chance of acceptance, the Government, of whatever complexion, will be compelled to defend the passage from the Mediterranean to the Red Sea. The Russians at Constantinople would be masters of the Suez Canal, for having the Black Sea all to themselves and the Bosphorus for a base of operations they could despatch to Egypt by land such an army as the English could not stop. If therefore England can find allies, she will prevent the Russians from occupying Bulgaria in permanence, and this is the more probable that Liberal opinion is unanimous in favour of the Bulgarians, and of the idea of a Balkan Federation, which Mr. Gladstone has always put forward.

Italy would probably incline to the cause of the liberty of peoples, defended by England and Austria; but no one would, I imagine, expect any military action from her. There remains to be questioned

the formidable Sphynx of Berlin. Every one acknowledges that the final decision depends on him. If he decidedly opposes the occupation of Bulgaria, it will not take place; for unless at least the Czar has lost all power of forecast, he will not go so far as to risk the quadruple alliance of Turkey, Austria, Germany and England. Some say Bismarck will not veto the occupation, because he does not want war. But, on the contrary, would not his veto be peace? And if he does not forbid, is it not because a conflict between Russia and Austria would not be disagreeable to him? Three years ago, when I travelled along the banks of the Danube and through the Balkan Peninsula, every one thought that this terrible duel was about to come off because Prince Bismarck desired it.

I will not venture to solve this awful enigma; but we may call to mind some remarks of the great Chancellor on this subject, which afford matter for reflection. In June 1883, Prince Bismarck, in the Prussian Parliament, addressing one of the heads of the Liberal opposition, spoke as follows:—

“The honourable deputy Richter is for economy in the budget, and so am I; but in what departments shall we economize? No doubt he refers to the military expenditure; it is only there that reduction is possible. But does not Herr Richter know that Germany is a pole towards which all the bayonets in Europe may point? Does he forget that ever since 1875 I have not paused for one moment in my efforts to prevent the formation of a triple alliance against us. Be sure of this, that on the day which shall see us weak and disarmed that alliance will be made.”

It was to prevent that triple alliance that Prince Bismarck, in 1879, entered into the very closest relations with Austria. The Austrian alliance is the pivot of his policy. He is threatened by the ever possible alliance of France and Russia. “Such an alliance,” he once said, “is so natural that we may consider it as already in existence.” When, in 1870, Bishop Strossmayer asked of the Russian ambassador at Vienna that the Czar should come to the relief of France, he was answered: “It would be an act of folly on our part. We shall now have an ally on whom we can always reckon in case of need.” May not Bismarck, knowing himself menaced both from East and West, think it wise to rid himself of one of his two enemies, while he is still sure of having Austria with him; or rather, may he not be very willing to see a struggle between Russia and Austria, in which he might, by supporting his ally, reduce one of his enemies to impotence for a long time to come? He may, perhaps, think the moment opportune. Germany has still with her Moltke and the other military leaders who fought the campaign of 1870; she has at her head the Iron Chancellor himself, the ablest politician of his age; while France has no general of reputation and no great strategist. It is certain that in 1875 Bismarck wanted—and if necessary, by force—to prevent the

French from reconstituting their army and their defences, and as he was hindered from doing so by the Emperor of Russia and Gortchakoff he must have thought of weakening that obstacle. The Eastern Question, by rendering the rivalry of Russia and Austria more acute, may some day furnish him with the means of accomplishing his object.

The Austro-German alliance rests upon common interests so obvious, that we may believe Count Taaffe's recent declaration that it remains unshaken. Austria, supported by Germany, is in truth mistress of the East. She only can speak the decisive word. Her influence in Servia is supreme. Bosnia and Herzegovina, under the skilful administration of Baron Kallay, are on the way to become completely assimilated to her. By protecting Bulgarian autonomy, and supporting, under the plea of the rights of nationalities, the idea of a Balkan Federation, she will, thanks to the inexplicable mistakes of Russia, see the whole Peninsula turn towards her, and accept her commercial and economic supremacy. There is no disguising the fact that since she has been able to dispose of the sword of Germany, she has grown from a weak and threatened Power into the arbiter of European politics. Germany, on her side, finds in the support of Austria security, and the certainty of being able to face both the East and the West at once. We may therefore conclude, that if Austria thinks she ought at one stroke to prevent Russia from occupying Bulgaria, and so being, by railway, at the very gates of Constantinople, Germany will support her. Prince Bismarck has often said that the German Empire has no direct interests in the East; and one can see from the Blue-Books (Turkey, I. and II.) that he comes to no decision without consulting Austria; but he has an overwhelming interest in holding the friendship of Austria, and this will determine his true position.

If the Czar, carried away by his anger, his resentments, and his embarrassments, should take the plunge, and brave the hostility of Austria, could he count on the support of France? Who will dare to say yes? No doubt the idea of the "Revanche" has not faded out of the French mind. On the contrary, it has been gaining strength for some time past. To satisfy oneself of this it is only necessary to read the French newspapers, or to note that a writer so cautious as M. Cherbuliez closes his recent article on Bulgarian affairs with the following words:—"France has no course to propose, but is it her duty to hold off from those who would speak with her, and can she prevent people from knowing where she lives?" (*Revue des Deux Mondes*, October 1, 1886). We must believe that France would choose her own time, and that she would not mingle in the fray, unless she saw Germany obliged to carry off a portion of her army to the East to cover the flank of Austria.

Whatever may be said, France has at her disposal very formidable military forces, animated by an ardent patriotism and an insatiable thirst for vengeance; her territory and her capital are now surrounded by a ring of detached forts and entrenched camps, so well planted that an invasion like that of 1870 has become impossible. But, on the other hand, she has no generalissimo who would, from the first start, be universally accepted—an indispensable condition of successful warfare in an epoch like ours, when the engagements of the first fortnight decide the campaign; and besides it would be very difficult for the French to get past the enormous fortifications of Strasbourg and Metz into the interior of Germany. They would therefore be obliged to invade by the valley of the Meuse, and endeavour to turn Cologne—a very dangerous plan of attack, according to the strategic authorities. Would these obvious difficulties be enough to prevent her from seizing the opportunity apparently offered by a war between Germany and Russia? At all events there would be for the French people a moment of cruel anxiety and perhaps of irresistible impulse.

Happily, at the moment at which I pen the concluding lines of this article, the danger which seemed imminent tends to recede. The Czar seems to be coming to understand that the road he was taking leads to disaster. We may hope that a very clear and marked understanding between England, Germany and Austria will always avail to stop him; and if this strange and mysterious journey of Lord Randolph Churchill has contributed to that end, the friends of humanity will owe him their best thanks.

I am not unaware that the English Liberals are very loth to see their country deeply involved—and especially by means of alliances—in the complications of continental politics. But circumstances may arise in which this may be the best way of preserving peace. If England were to decide to defend only her own shores, and to leave the rest of her Empire to the attacks of her rivals, she would rightly pursue a policy of absolute isolation. But if it be necessary to keep in view the moment when she may be compelled to appeal to arms, whether to defend Constantinople or India, would it not be worth her while to escape so terrible a necessity, even at the price of continental alliances, provided that they had for their object the rights and liberties of nations, and the maintenance of international law? It is not enough to desire and to resolve on peace, we must also make up our minds to do all that is needful to secure it.

EMILE DE LAVELEYE.