

High Albania

(extracts)

Mary Edith Durham

Chapter X

PRIZREN

"Onamo, onamo,
Da vidju Prizren!"
(Onward, onward, let me see Prizren.)
—H.R.H. NIKOLA, of Montenegro.

THE first strema we had engaged to take us to Prizren was requisitioned by a Moslem Bey at the last moment. We got off, finally, one morning at 8.30 A.M.

The road, quite a decent one, followed up the left bank of the Erenik as far as Ura Terzijit (the Tailors' Bridge)—a grand stone bridge of eleven arches—said to have been built three hundred years ago by the tailors of Djakova and Prizren.

Fording the river, we drove up the right bank, and struck across to the White Drin. Erenik joins Drin through a narrow gully, where a hill arises from the plain, and is spanned by a lofty bridge of one large arch, Ura Fshait. Our driver suddenly loaded his Martini, and rushed off to shoot at two wild-geese on the river. It proved a wild-goose chase.

We drove along the plain, on Drin's right bank, passing on our left a Moslem village, Djurtha, and on our right another, Ragova, both with mosques. Fording Drin, we halted at midday at Han Krusha, a newly-built inn of mud bricks, whose Moslem owners were most civil. Then on over land that was fairly cultivated and looked fertile—maize, corn, and tobacco—and through Pirona, a large Moslem village, up over rising ground, and there lay Prizren in the valley below, with the ruins of an old castle and the white walls of modern barracks on the height beyond.

Fortune was favouring me beyond my deserts. Prizren was another of my dream cities, and I beheld it with my waking eyes.

Prince Nicholas' song—the song that enshrines in a few verses the Great Servian Idea—the song that every Serb school-child knows, "Onward, onward, let me see Prizren," rang in my memory. I had seen the tribesmen of Montenegro sing it with tears in their eyes. I had heard it secretly sung in Bosnia, where it is forbidden by the Austrian Government.

After the Russian-Turkish war, when the beaten Turk had to yield to Europe's demands, the dearest hope of the Serb people was that Prizren, the heart of the old Servian Empire, the capital of Tsar Dushan, would shortly again be theirs.

Pondering all these things, we clattered into the town.

Prizren is a large town, and highly picturesque. It lies both sides of the Prizrenski Bistritza (a tributary of the Drin), and sprawls up the mountain-side, from which spirt and gush numberless streams of clear, cold water. The water supply is quite amazing, and the river would be a considerable size were it not diverted into three channels at different levels, which supply the town and work mills.

The streets are very fairly clean, and the town full of life and activity.

But even the best friend of the Serbs must admit that it is a Moslem Albanian town. The Servian Metropolitan had already lamented to me that the Serbs were in a considerable minority, but I had not expected to find them such a mere drop in the ocean.

The census just made under the Constitution gives:

Moslem houses 3500

Servian houses (with 4320 inhabitants) 950

Catholic Albanian houses 180

Vlah houses 180 * (see footnote)

In the case of the Christians, I believe these figures to be fairly correct. The Prizren Moslems, already alarmed at the rumour that Constitution meant loss of privilege to them, and determined not to be compelled to give military service, were said to have understated the number of their houses and to have refused to give the number of inhabitants. It could be reckoned, I was told, at ten to a house.

Of the Moslems, some are genuine Ottoman Turks, settled since early days, but the bulk are Albanian.

Each nation that designs to pick up the pieces, when Turkey in Europe bursts up, keeps a Consul on the spot. A Russian represents Slav interests, to claim the land as Old Servia. An acute Austrian is posted there to forward his country's plan of "Advance, Austria," and Italy has had to plant a man to see what he is doing. The Moslem Albanian objects to the presence of all of them, and the Turkish Government impartially gives them all armed escort. There is something truly pathetic about the way Turkey, everywhere, carefully protects the gentlemen whose only raison d'etre is to hasten the dismemberment of the land.

Servia sent a Consul some years ago but he was almost immediately forced to withdraw by the populace.

Of one thing the populace is determined: that is, that never again shall the land be Serb.

The Moslem Albanian's game, here as elsewhere, had been to support the Turkish Government in order to keep out others, and he was already growling sullenly at the Constitution, as offering equality to Christian Slavs, and therefore threatening Albanian power.

The leading Serbs of the town kindly invited me to stay at a private house, but, as I did not wish to be attached to any political party, and meant to see life in general, I stayed at an inn, where folk of all sorts came to drink.

September 1st saw all the streets gay with flags, tissue-paper chains and fans, for the Sultan's accession day. I called, at the correct hour, at the Seralio. Over the entrance gate is a great wooden star, the rays of varying length, with tiny crescent moons on their tips (is it really the sun and moon?). The yard was full of Nizams, gendarmes, and officials in their best. Upstairs, the Vali-Pasha, gorgeous with medals and decorations, was receiving in state.

The Consuls were present in uniform. The police officer, who showed dirty ragged me in, said that the Vali-Pasha spoke Serb. He turned out to be a Herzegovinian from Trebinje. We got on beautifully. He had expected me before. Scutari had warned him of my approach. Had heard of me from Djakova, and sent suvarris to meet me, but I had disappeared. I explained I had been to Devich in a cart, without escort. I relied on the besa, and wanted no escorts. He hastened to say that peace and prosperity were established for evermore. I congratulated the Sultan, and was given a glass of pink syrup.

The Vali-Pasha was amazed at the route I had chosen. I could have come in comfort, he said, by steamer from Scutari to Saloniki, thence by rail, quite alla franga, to Ferizovich, and driven in a carriage to Prizren. For himself, he never went up country unless obliged—I never found a Turkish governor that did. The wild-cat methods of the English were beyond him. I might go where I pleased, but "sooner you than I" was his attitude.

Having thus advertised to authority the confidence which the British Empire put in the new order of things, I did not expound my private opinion, which was then, that the Turkish Empire was playing possibly the first scene of the last act of its tragic existence, but withdrew. And unluckily just missed a farcical interlude, for the chief accountant, accused of embezzling public funds, was attacked and chivied from the town with a petroleum can on his head.

It was a general holiday, bands pom-pommed all night. The heat was intense, and sleep impossible. I did not get to the bazar till 7.30 A.M. next morning, a scandalously late hour in these lands.

It is a grand bazar. Worth all the journey, for as yet it is but little spoiled with alla franga. The gold embroidery is not to be surpassed anywhere; the tailors' shops are a blaze of gorgeous colour and design. Had it not been for the difficulties of transport, I should have ruined myself. As for the carved walnut-wood frames inlaid with silver, they are the finest work of the kind I have seen anywhere. It was in Prizren in the olden days that the finest artists in gold and silver inlay flourished, and turned out yataghans and gunbarrels fit for fairy princes, and from thence they spread into Bosnia. The so-called Bosnian inlay is mainly of Albanian origin, and much of it actually Albanian handicraft.

The demand for very fine work is now slight—alla franga will maybe soon kill it—but there are still in Prizren workmen who can execute it.

The main trade is in rough and cheap ornaments for the peasants. The silver-workers are all Christian.

I wandered up and down and in and out the long wooden tunnels of the bazar streets, dark with hot, rich shadow, glowing with goods.

Gentian root and iris root are heaped at the herbalists', black nuts for the black hair-dye of the Christians and logwood for the red of the Moslems, henna for the palms and finger-nails. Three-cornered amulets sewn up in velvet, strings of dried bamias for stewing, jeleks and djemadans richly embroidered with thick orange silk cord, horse-trappings with scarlet tassels, and gay saddlebags.

Out in the big open spaces, in a glory of golden light, were piled tons of grapes, peaches, melons, pumpkins, gourds, glowing heaps of scarlet and orange tomatoes, shiny paprikas, yellow, green, and red, black purple patajans (aubergines), long green bamias, cabbage, lettuces, beans, in Arabian Nights profusion. Then I heard the East a-calling, and cried in my heart, as I thought of the Powers that crouched like beasts of prey upon the frontier ready to spring and shatter this world:-

"Confound their politics,
Frustrate their knavish tricks."

I remembered the words of an old Albanian, spoken long before Constitution days: "The Turkish Empire is an old house, decayed and crumbling. It is propped within and without, and will stand for who knows how long. But if any one tries to repair it, and moves but one prop-but one brick even-it will fall about his ears. It is too late to repair it." And the peace that reigned in the bazar seemed the hush before the storm.

"Constitution justice" was much discussed. On one of the festival days to celebrate the Constitution, a Moslem zaptieh had made an attempt on a Christian maiden for which he had been condemned to be flogged so severely that he died the next day. Encouraged by this, a Serb zaptieh had then arrested a Moslem for theft, and had been expelled from the town and the service. Serb zaptiehs were only to arrest Christians. A Moslem who had shot a man at Mitrovitza had been hanged at once without trial. This afforded satisfaction to the Christians, until it transpired that the shooting was really a pure accident, then the Moslems were enraged. The Young Turks were suffering from trop de zele.

Next day I was to dine at the Servian Bogoslovia (Theological School) at noon. At 10.30 in rushed Marko, "You will not be able to dine with the Serbs. There is a revolution!" I rushed out to see. The alarm had already been given. In ten minutes every shop was shut and barred, and all the Moslems fully armed were rushing down the street to the Seralio, led by Sherrif Effendi, a very popular Hodja, acclaimed as their head by the Moslems of Prizren and Ljuma.

The armed crowd swung down the street in a pack, like wolves on the trail-a far finer show than the few ragged Nizams that followed. The air was full of rumours. Sherrif was said to be responsible for the expulsion of the Serb zaptieh. He and his were prepared to defend the Sheriat (Turkish law) at any price, and would tolerate no privileges for the Christians. They returned shortly, satisfied that no immediate attempt would be made on it.

The fact that the whole population can turn out under arms within ten minutes gives an idea of the possibilities of the town. Like a couchant tiger, brilliant, bizarre, and beautiful, it is ever ready to spring. Unlike the tiger, it is industrious. Having decided not to revolute further, for the time being, the whole crowd was at work again at the various primitive manufactures of the place, shops reopened, and eating-houses in full swing in another hour's time.

I went off to the Servian Bogoslovia. The Director, his wife, and three children were recently arrived from Belgrade. They received me with the greatest hospitality; were afraid the revolution would prevent my coming. The poor lady, terrified of the Albanians, was amazed to hear I had been out to see it. (Web Page - Serbian Orthodox Diocese of Raska-Prizren)

The school, a fine building, recently enlarged and repaired, holds a hundred students. Many come from Montenegro even. I went over it sadly. It seemed sheer folly to make a large and costly Serb theological school in a Moslem Albanian town, and to import masters and students, when funds are so urgently needed to develop free Serb lands.

The white castle of Tsar Lazar was but a dream in the night of the past. Around us in the daylight was the Albanian population, waiting, under arms, to defend the land that had been theirs in the beginning of time.

An old Bariaktar, eighty years of age, in the mountains, had, but a few weeks before, told me how Prince Nikola, flushed with victory, at the close of the war in 1877, had said to him: "You and I will live to see my flag float over Prizren!" "And neither he nor I will ever live to see it," said the old man.

We sat down to a regular Serb dinner, the first I had eaten for more than a year—kiselu chorba (sour soup), fried chicken paprika, kiselu mleko (sour milk), all excellent of its kind. The Director knew all about me, and regarded me as the champion of the Serbs in England. I accepted his hospitality unhappily, for I felt that, so far as Prizren and its neighbourhood were concerned, the cause was lost, dead and gone—as lost as is Calais to England, and the English claim to Normandy. And the mere terror of his wife showed how completely she felt herself a stranger in an unknown land. Yet I could not but admire the imaginative nature of the Serb, who will lead a forlorn hope and face death for an idea.

And—for I do not know the how manyeth time—I cursed the Berlin Treaty, which did not award to this people the truly Serb lands of Bosnia and the Herzegovina, where they could have gathered their scattered forces and developed, but gave them to be crushed under Austria.

I left the poor little Serb quarter—the houses clustered on the hillside around the two churches (for there is an old and a new one), and the school—and found Marko waiting me without. He is the worthiest and kindest of souls, but race instinct, that strongest of all human passions, prevails—he does not like the Shkia (Slav).

The real policy of Serb and Albanian should be to unite, and keep the foreign intruders from the Balkan Peninsula. But this will never be.

Poor Marko would never admit to me that there were any Serbs in Prizren. "What is that man?" I would ask.

"A native."

"What do you mean by a native?"

"He was born here."

"Yes, but is he a Serb or Albanian?"

"Lady, there are no Serbs here. This is an Albanian town."

Further pressed, he would admit: "Perhaps he belongs to that schismatic Church. I know nothing about his religion." And this, though Serb costume and speech were unmistakable.

Of early Servian days, naught now remains but the ruins said to be those of Tsar Dushan's white tower. I went in search of them up the valley of the Prizrenski Bistritza (called also

Kara Potok), along the foot of the hill on which the fortress stands, and through a suburb (Kirch Bonar). We left the town behind us, and followed the lonely valley. Below us, men were collecting stones for building—poking them out of the half-dried bed of the stream with crowbars, and loading them on packhorses, which filed off to the town. The stones, I was told, were thus obtained "ready made," and all trouble of blasting and hewing saved. But the time spent in levering up one stone, and the impossibility of loading up more than about a dozen large ones on a pack-saddle, made the labour and loss of time quite appalling.

About half-an-hour up the valley, it turns suddenly, and the rocky crag on which stand the remains of Dushan's castle comes into view, rising isolated in a ring of mountains, the great Shar Planina rising up behind. Lonely and ruined, only a wall or two and some fragments remain of the white tower of the ballads—as wrecked as his Empire. Here he sat, and drank red wine with his Voyvodas. Hence he rode with a great army to sway the fortunes of the Balkans.

I turned from the desolate "sic transit " spot, and, returning down the valley, found the women of Prizren on the river bank, bleaching hand-woven linen in the sun, and sprinkling it with fresh spring water, as they have done doubtless since the days of Dushan.

From Prizren to Grachanitsa

I decided that the best way of seeing Kosovo plain would be to drive over it with a Serb driver, the man that drove us to Devich. Leaving most of my scanty possessions with the hanjee till I returned, we left Prizren at 4.20 A.M., in a cold dawn—a lemon-yellow gash above the horizon marking where the sleepy sun would soon arise, as we drove through a large Moslem graveyard that lay desolate on either hand.

The first village of any size was Korisha, all Christian, consisting partly of Serbs and partly of Roman Catholic Albanians from Fandi. Above it, up a valley on the right, is a large Serb church, Sveti Marko.

On, past scattered groups of houses within stockades, land cultivated with maize and tobacco, across the little river Sofina, and over a low range of hills, we went, and descended to Suha Reka (lit. dry river), a large village which, in spite of its Serb name, is now, according to the Serb driver, all Moslem Albanian. A black and white mass of magpies was feasting on the stinking carcase of a horse at the entrance, and rose screaming as we passed. We crossed the stream (by no means a dry river) on a wooden bridge. Then we ascended again, and drove over a great plateau of scrub-oak. On the left, we passed Pechanj, a Moslem village, and Dulje, consisting of stockaded groups on either side of the road. The road was actually being re-made; men were working on it in three places, and new stone bridges were being built. What was done was really very good; of the rest, the less said the better. We passed over Chafa Duljash, and descended into the beautiful wooded valley of the Crnoleva, and halted for midday at Han Crnoleva, an Albanian house. The place-names, it will be noted, are all Serb. The driver, himself a Serb, said regretfully that everywhere the majority of the population is Albanian.

We descended the valley, rich with beech forests on either side, to Stimlje, a very large village, whence the main road leads to Ferizovich and the railway. There spread out, burnt, and parched before us for miles and miles, was Kosovo-polje, the fatal field on which the Turks gained the victory that established them, even to this day, in Europe—the Armageddon of the Servian people.

"Kosovo-polje," said the Serb briefly. It summed up all the fate of his race. In the spring every year, he added, all the unploughed land is covered with blood-red flowers that grow in memory of the fight; they are sent by God.

We struck across the great plain, uncultivated, desolate, and undulating; the parched turf was split into yawning cracks by the drought, the scrub hawthorn burnt brown, the track dusty, and we reached the Sitnitza, crawling shrivelled between banks of cracked mud—the river that once ran red with the blood of heroes.

"Thy Milosh, O lady, fell by the cold waters of the Sitnitza, where many Turks perished. He left a name to the Servian people that will be sung so long as there are men and Kosovo field"—runs the ballad. Over this dreary plain spread the Turkish army, "steed by steed, warrior by warrior; the spears were like unto a black forest; the banners like the clouds, their tents like the snows; had rain fallen from the heavens it would have dropped, not upon the earth, but upon goodly steeds and warriors."

After Sitnitza we passed several stockaded villages—all Moslem—and the earth looked black and fat, but the plain as a whole lacks water. We plodded ceaselessly on through heat and dust, seeming to get no farther. Suddenly there was the iron track of the railway—an impossible anachronism—stretching as far as the eye could see on either hand across our path. "The railway!" I cried. "There is no railway here, lady," said the dozing Marko solemnly. Our strema bumped over the rails; he gazed at them: "Dear God!" he cried, and could scarce believe his eyes. We reached Lipanj, the station, which was crowded with buffalo-carts loaded with sacks of maize, waiting for the next train to Saloniki. Three trains run up and three down every week, and none on Sundays. Marko mourned the days when all goods came down on packbeasts to Scutari. This rail had killed Scutari, and indeed all the transport trade of North Albania.

Grachanitsa Monastery

We left it and all sign of the twentieth century, and reached the borders of the plain—up over low, parched, dusty hills, and at last saw the cupolas of the Monastery of Grachanitzza rising from the valley below. We arrived there at 5 P.M. The imposing red and white church towered above us as we drove through a ramshackle wooden gateway into the monastery grounds, round which stood two old buildings, and one new and unfinished.

The old Stareshina, a jeromonah, and a young djakon, surprised and hospitable, came out to greet me, and we were soon sitting in the monastery balcony opposite the church, whose mellow tones glowed in the afternoon light. My companions had had one foreign visitor before. They thought he was French, but "he could not talk." I could, and their joy was great. They asked of the great world beyond the Turkish frontiers; if it were true that there was a railway that went underground, and another that was on the roofs of houses—of electricity and motor cars. And we talked of Great Serbia and Kosovo-polje. For from the Monastery of Grachanitzza came forth the monks who gave the Communion to all the army of Tsar Lazar before the fatal fight, and the great church is a monument of pre-Turkish days.

It was founded by King Milutin (1275-1321), who planted his victorious standard even on Mount Athos—father of Stefan Dechanski, and grandfather of the great Stefan Dushan, said the Stareshina. Built of large stone blocks, with two courses of narrow red-tile bricks between each horizontal course and one between each upright, the red and white effect is original and beautiful; the wide mouldings are all of bricks in patterns; the narrow, round-headed windows have herring-boned brickwork above them; there is a high central dome, and a small one at each of the four corners.

The original building was nearly square, with an apse, but a large narthex was added two hundred years later, which somewhat spoils the appearance of the building, as it is inferior in style.

The interior is frescoed with saints, gaunt and Byzantine, on a ground which is now nearly black. The central dome is borne on four large square piers, on the right hand one of which is King Milutin, and on the left his Queen, sister of a Byzantine Emperor, stiff and gorgeous in their royal robes—the Queen with a huge jewelled gold crown and large round pendants (or ear-rings), recalling those of the Herzegovinian peasant women—the King long-faced, with a pointed beard. One of the piers is hollow, and a steep and narrow staircase inside it leads up to a small chapel in the roof, with a window giving into the church—said to have been made for the royal family to hear Mass from, though how they managed to climb on a stool and squeeze through that door and up that staircase in those royal robes I do not know.

The lower parts of all the frescoes are much damaged, as the Turks used the church as a stable, and until a hundred years ago it was several feet deep with mud and manure. The upper ones are fairly preserved and are said, probably with truth, to be contemporary with the building of the church—at any rate they are pre-Kosovo (1389), and have not suffered restoration.

The tall slits of windows admit little light. The interior is dim, with faded colour and embrowned gold—old-world, barbaric, decorative. Art to be decorative must be barbaric. When it becomes "civilized" it becomes anemic, and crawls feebly in pallid mauves and greens, with long spindle stalks that lack vitality to throw out more than one or two atrophied leaves. It has lost red blood and the joy of life.

In the more recent narthex are frescoes of St. Sava and his father St. Simeon, the first of the Nemanja line of Kings that led Serbia to glory; it ended with Tsar Dushan. Serbia rose with the Nemanjas—and fell with them.

St. Simeon is pictured not as king, but in a grey cloak as monk of Mount Athos, whither he retired. He is hooded, and wears a moustache and a beard in two points. St. Sava, first Bishop of Serbia, is in his bishop's robes. Unlike the present Bishops of the Orthodox Church, his head is tonsured, the whole crown shaven, but the locks below left long and curling to the shoulders. He, too, wears moustache and beard. Both have long faces, and the long aquiline nose with the drooping tip so characteristic of the fair Albanian. This is a curious fact, as the paintings are undoubtedly, very old, and though not contemporary portraits (St. Sava died in 1237), yet Byzantine art is so extraordinarily conservative that it is possible they are traditional likenesses. For the Nemanja stem sprang from the Zeta (Montenegro, the district where the mingling of Serb and Albanian blood seems most marked). Is it too fanciful to suggest that it was to a dash of Albanian blood that the victorious Nemanjas owed their success and the Montenegrins their independence? The now dwindled and poverty-stricken monastery formerly possessed a printing-press, and printed many church books, a few of which it still preserves.

The three ecclesiasts mourned the past and were hopeless of the future. They, and the young schoolmaster who had joined us, took me out to see the village that adjoins the monastery. It consists of about seventy stockaded "houses," fifteen of which have recently been taken by Moslem Albanians, the rest all Orthodox Serbs. Many of these "houses" are zadrugas (communal groups). I asked to see one. The Stareshina, having first shouted to an old woman feeding pigs from a petroleum can to call off the dogs, we entered and were heartily welcomed. The main house, recently rebuilt, was fairly smart, with a new tiled roof which projected far in front, and formed a verandah under which we sat. It, like most of the houses

where stone is scarce, was a frame-house of mud and wattle. I take this to be one of the earliest types; that of chepchis (mud bricks) seems a later development.

On the left a house just begun showed the method of construction. The house is merely a large frame of unshaped beams, resting on a base of three courses of unhewn stones. The uprights are roughly mortised into the horizontals. The cross-beams between the main uprights are quite childishly placed, with no science of how to support and strengthen the building. On to this frame are fastened the wattle walls, and the whole is thickly smeared with mud, and smoothly finished. In quite small sheds the uprights are driven straight into the ground, and the wattle wound round them.

On the right of the main house (A) were three small and much rougher houses (B), the sleeping rooms of the three married sons. C was a hut of wattle not mudded, as it was the dairy, and a through draught needed. D, D were two cattlesheds, and E, E the usual Balkan wattled maize barn. Near the cattlesheds were some straw ricks and the usual round wattled henhouse (F), and the whole was surrounded by a high stockade, as before described.

The old lady wore her black hair in a very thick plait on either side of the face, doubled back so as to make a solid block, which, with a flat drapery on the top of the head, gave an odd, square, Egyptian effect. Her shirtsleeves were most beautifully embroidered; she wore a little black kilted frill round her waist and a scarlet apron. The daughters-in-law appeared and her one unmarried daughter, who, we were proudly told, was betrothed. They all kissed me heartily, and insisted on making me coffee. Their interest in me was extreme. Never before had they seen a foreigner, and they had not the faintest idea whence I came, for the name of England and the British Empire were unknown to them. But the fact that it would take more than three weeks to ride to my vilayet on a horse was enough for them.

My unmarried condition bothered them horribly. They discussed it eagerly, to the great interest of the churchmen, who were equally curious but too polite to ask. We had arrived at questions which—even in Servian—were most embarrassingly personal and physiological, when luckily one of the pigs got its head jammed in the petroleum can, rushed thus bonneted shrieking through the yard, and diverted the conversation. A number of children came out of the three huts, all unusually clean and neat, well-grown and healthy. They were very markedly broad-headed at the temples, and some were almost blue-eyed. All were learning to read, write, and reckon, and were given very good characters by the schoolmaster.

The land was all worked on the chiftlik system, the workers getting three-quarters of the profits, the owner supplying the implements. This seemed to me liberal pay, and I astonished them by saying so. Even the priests were under the impression that it was only under the Turks that the people did not own the land they worked. Their amazement was great when I explained roughly how the agricultural labourer lived with us. The idea of paying rent amazed and shocked them. They regarded working for another as, under any circumstances, "veliki zalum " (great tyranny). I asked what was the objection supposing one was well paid. They replied, the master told them to go here and fetch straw, and to go there and sell hay when they did not want to do it—when to-morrow would do as well. Perhaps for a Christian master it might be all right, but it was always very hard to work for another. Their master forced them to work on Sunday.

About the Constitution they were hopeful. Since it had been started they had lived without fear. Previously they had always feared robbery and assault. If the beasts were not shut inside the stockade at night they would certainly be stolen. Only they feared lest Constitution meant that the land would always belong to the Turks. Many people had left the neighbourhood because of the great tyranny and had gone to America. Many others had been shot. There were much fewer Serbs here than formerly.

I very heartily wished good luck to this kindly hardworking family, and left their tidy homestead, when great herds of buffaloes, sheep, and goats were plodding into the village in a blinding cloud of dust which the setting sun turned to a golden glory. I was glad to turn in early that night, for it had been a long day crammed with new experiences. The jeromonah and the serving-man woke me at five next morning by hammering respectively on the slung wooden and iron bar, that served as bells, a rude rhythm.

Prishtina

The coachman had bargained to take us on to Prishtina, provided we left early. So about eight we said adieu. I wrote my name in Servian in the monastery book, and we drove off. It was bitterly cold. Up till yesterday the summer heat had been nearly intolerable. Even driving in the strema I had sweated through all my scanty attire. Now autumn had come at a blow, and a most bitter wind swept hill and plain. After barely an hour's drive over two low hills, we saw Prishtina below us, gay with red roofs, green trees, and white minarets. Within, it is frowsy, dirty, tumble-down—a shade better than Djakova, and that is all that can be said.

I marvelled that the Metropolitan should choose to reside here rather than at Prizren.

The population is mixed, and the statistics impossible to obtain, as every one gave different figures. There are about 2500 houses, of which about a quarter are Orthodox. Of these many are Vlachs, not Serbs. There are also a considerable number of Spanish Jews—some said as many as two hundred houses, and there are no Roman Catholics at all. The bulk of the population is Moslem, mostly Albanian; probably also some Moslem Serbs.

The bazar, partly roofed, but the roof all to pieces, was full of foreign rubbish of the cheapest description—one of the benefits brought by the railway. There was a sickening display of diseased meat in the butcher's quarter. The silver-workers here, as elsewhere, were all Christian. Of one—a Vlach from Monastir—I bought a charming little amulet, made of a mole's foot.

We lodged at an inn kept by a Vlach, who, as I was such a rare bird, most kindly invited me to visit his private house. And all his family in their best—the ladies dressed alla Turka—received me with great hospitality, and the very strongest rakia it has ever been my fate to sample. Marko was quite happy here. The Albanian and the Vlach meet as brothers. "Vlachs have sweet blood," said Marko; "not like Slavs." "Vlachs are like us" said an Albanian to me once; "a man will marry his daughter to a Vlach; but a Slav is different—sour through and through."

The Vlach is believed by some to be the descendant of the Roman colonist and original inhabitant. It is possible that both Vlach and Albanian are unconsciously aware that "blood is thicker than water."

According to promise, I called on his Grace, the Servian Metropolitan. And the same night he sent two schoolmasters to invite and escort both Marko and myself to sup with him.

Off we went, and found a large party—the Metropolitan, his secretary the Archimandrite, and all the schoolmistresses who had been at Devich. The Metropolitan, in the highest spirits and most festive, received us with bottled beer, jam, and water. The whole party had only just recovered from the results of Devich. The schoolmistresses had all been violently sick, or had bad colds, and the Metropolitan completely knocked up. I was the only one who had got off scot-free. When the beer was done we adjourned to the supper-room. I was placed at the right of the Metropolitan. The Archimandrite, a most kindly man, took Marko under his wing. He

spoke a little German, and, trying to be very friendly; said: "Ach, my dear Marko! You are an Albanian; and you have come to see our Old Servia. Ach, but that is very beautiful!"

Poor Marko was paralysed with horror. To the genuine Albanian the mere name Old Servia is as "a red rag to a bull."

We had a grand "spread." The Metropolitan insisted that, *alla franga*, it was correct to begin with a *hors d'oeuvre*. There ensued a great search in the dining-room cupboard, and the Metropolitan discussed which of many mysterious tins should be opened. His final selection turned out to be potted ham. We emptied the tin, and then started on a vast dinner of five courses, all good and extremely "filling," washed down with some good Servian white wine. And the Metropolitan enlivened the meal with humorous tales. It was late before I turned in at the han.

On the plain, just below Prishtina, on that fatal June day in 1389, fell Sultan Murad, slain by that best-beloved of Servian heroes, Milosh Obilich.

Sultan Murad's tomb:

I drove down over the plain to Sultan Murad's tomb, passing, on the hill above, the turba of his standard-bearer, buried on the spot where he fell.

Murad's turba—or, rather, small mosque—stands in a walled-in ground, containing several graves, with a guardian's house at the entrance.

Rather to my surprise, I was at once admitted, and even invited to walk in with my boots on. Everything was changed now since "Constitution." If a female Giaour could come without escort to Kosovo-polje, God alone knew what would happen next. Nor did any one seem to mind.

As there were two Turks praying in the building, I refrained from desecrating it with Giaour boots ("Constitution"—if it is to mean anything—requiring, at any rate, respect for everybody's beliefs), and stood in the doorway.

In the centre, on a very fine Turkey carpet, stands the large coffin, covered with black cloth, and over it several coloured silk draperies—one, of crimson and silver, very handsome. At the head of the coffin is a great white turban of the old pattern, covered with a dark green and silver scarf. The decorations of the room are appalling. The walls are stencilled in crude colours to look like the cheapest wall-paper. Shiny *alla franga* wooden curtain-poles and red curtains of the lodging-house type adorn the windows; and over the coffin hangs a large glass chandelier.

The whole place had recently, said the guardian, been beautified. I stared at the hopeless incongruity of the adornment.

The nation that had done this had just dressed itself up in an imitation *alla franga* Constitution. Would it be any more suitable? I thought of the Daw in borrowed plumes, the Wolf in sheep's clothing, and of the Old, old Man who "madly thrust a left-hand foot into a right-hand shoe."

It was bitterly cold; an icy wind swept the plain. I left the spot on which the Turk had established himself in Europe and wondered whether the fact that he proposed now to take a new lease of life and remain was one to rejoice over.

I myself was the first visible sign of "Constitution" from the outer world, and, as such, of interest to the populace; so a Turkish officer travelling through Prishtina—an Ottoman Turk (not Moslem Slav or Albanian)—most kindly insisted on my visiting his family—temporarily established in a Moslem house—while Marko was entertained by officers below, in which company I too should have felt more at home. I was taken upstairs and shot into an apartment full of stout, pallid, collopy females, and a heap of children. There were nine women. I never discovered which belonged to whom. Door and windows were tightly shut; a mangal of hot charcoal burnt in the midst. The atmosphere was monkey-house.

Two of the women spoke Serb fluently, so I was thoroughly and effectively interviewed amid shrieks of laughter. The idea of an unmarried woman travelling with a man was new to them, and their conversation quite unprintable. They all sat on the floor smoking and eating oddments—roasted maize-cobs, bits of melon, sticky lumps of rahat-lakum, sugar-sticks. These people nibble all day. The floor was messy with seeds and bits. Heaps of soiled, crumpled garments were strewn around. Every one was touzled and dressed, half or wholly, alla franga, but wore their European clothes in Oriental manner—unbuttoned, crumpled, torn, and impossible. One, in European dishabille, had hitched up her white petticoats for greater convenience in squatting cross-legged. She was a handsome young woman, but her appearance with dangling pink stocking suspenders, of which she was very proud, and unbuttoned bodice, was unlovely.

The oldest lady had almost scarlet hair. Another, not so successful, had come out streaky, and, as the natural colour of her hair was black, the effect was comically tigerish. The eyebrows of all were painted black as broad as the finger, and joined in the middle, and their toe- as well as finger-nails were red with henna. All looked most unwholesome, and one had a row of burst glands oozing down the side of her neck. Only one was an effective colour arrangement. She was partly alla Turka, had scarlet hair with an orange handkerchief on it, and a striped white and yellow shirt. But she was as broad as she was long—and bulgy.

Being kept mainly for breeding purposes, their conversation was much like what that of a cow might be, could it talk. They were most friendly, plied me with coffee and pieces of all the eatables, and pressed me to stay the night—there was plenty of room for another—or come tomorrow. And I tore myself away with difficulty.

I give the above details because I invariably find that gentlemen of all nations are consumed with curiosity about the secrets of the harem. I thought of the bright, tidy Vlah women, of the civilised Serbs, of the poor Catholic women in Djakova, their clean rooms and intelligent questions; and I asked myself if they were not after all right when they said, "The Young Turk is the son of the Old Turk." Islam has, so far, done nothing but evil in Europe.

Mitrovitza

Having come so far, I decided to go on to Mitrovitza by rail to save time, and learnt the day, but not the hour, at which the one train ran—only that the station was a very long way off; that I must start early, and that if I went with some others who were going it would be all right. We got seats in a carriage with another man, a Moslem Slav. I was eating soup, not knowing when I should again see food, when the carriage arrived, and, urgently requested, left it, jumped into the carriage, and off we went over the hills at a hand-gallop in company with three other carriages—one filled with young men with tambourines and a fiddle, who played and sang loudly all the way; for a railway journey in these parts is a great event.

We arrived at 10.30 A.M. to learn that the train—which was generally late—was not even due till 12.30. "God be praised!" cried every one; "we are in time!" There were plenty of people already there—buffalo-carts—baggage—a regular hurly-burly, and a man had already lighted a fire on the platform and was cooking kebabs and vegetables for such as desired refreshment. Even Marko was surprised that I thought we were too early, and looked on a railway journey as "not by any to be enterprised nor taken in hand unadvisedly, lightly, or wantonly." The inspection, however, of teskerehs and the entering of the name (especially mine) and destination of each of us into the police book whiled away much time.

Moslem women, as fast as they arrived, were hastily driven into a separate waiting-room with opaque windows. I talked to our Moslem travelling companion, a native of Prishtina. There were very many more people than usual travelling, he said, because it was safe. Till now the railway had been of little use. It was three-quarters of an hour from the town, and the road was too dangerous—could never be ventured on unarmed; as for the plain, till now it had been most dangerous. "Look at me," he said, tapping his sash. "This is the first time in my life I have ever come out so far without a revolver. I have no weapon at all, and am not afraid."

I asked if it had been as dangerous for Moslems as Christians, and he replied that robbers did not mind what you were so long as you were worth robbing. He was so astonished at the present calm that he knew not what to make of it. It was "like a dream, and could not last." A female Giaour from abroad (myself) had crossed the plain without escort—after that, anything amazing might happen. He himself wanted peace and a good government.

The train was punctual. Its smooth motion after the jolting strema made Marko cry delightedly, "It is like swimming in oil!" I went third-class, and luckily travelled with a Spanish Jew and his wife, so sampled all the mixed races of Prishtina.

He, a splendid old man of seventy years with a patriarchal beard, was saying farewell for ever to Prishtina, for he meant to die in Jerusalem, whither he was now bound. His poor old wife wept most bitterly at parting with her relations, who clung to the carriage door till the train started. He looked on stoically, moved only by the elemental passion—earth-hunger, the desire of a man for the land of his forebears. With all their worldly goods contained in a large basket and a sack, the aged couple were going to Sarajevo, where he would say good-bye to his old brother—and then to Jerusalem. I trust he has found peace in the Promised Land of his dreams.

The train ran through fertile land, cultivated fairly well, passing only one town, or rather village, of any size, Vuchitrn (wolf's thorn)—said to be largely Serb.

Mitrovitza, on rising ground at the very end of Kosovo plain, is small, but cleaner and less hopeless-looking than Prishtina. It is a new town made mainly since the railway; and, as it is on the junction of the Sitnitza and the Ibar, has a good and ample water supply, and fine vegetable gardens.

I strolled through the bazar, and was promptly hailed by a silversmith. "That foreign woman. Where does she come from?" "From London." "From London! Do you know my brother-in-law, X?" "I do." The world is very small. I had found a friend in a far country. We drank coffee, and I departed laden with messages for his people.

There are but ten Roman Catholic families in Mitrovitza, and one priest. The number of Orthodox I failed to learn; they are building a large new church. The large majority of the town are Moslems, who were not going to make census returns though ordered by "Constitution"—the news having just come in that Ipek and Djakova had flatly refused; and that certain villages which had made a return had made a false one to dodge possible conscription.

We found quarters at the han of a friendly little Vlah, who said that he woke up every day surprised to still find peace. "We were living like snakes in holes, and now here we are all out in the sun!" And we fed at a restaurant newly opened by some Italians from Fiume, who had hurried to be first on the spot when Baron Aehrenthal announced that the railway from Mitrovitza to Uvatz was about to be made—the railway which was to be the last link in the chain, and to convey Austrian troops to Saloniki. The plans for Austrian advance had for the time being been completely upset by that "bolt from the blue," Constitution. But Mitrovitza, though it looked so peaceful, is tinder waiting for a spark.

Here we come to the crucial race question.

Exact figures are unattainable, but of the general facts there can be no doubt. Kosovo plain is now, by a very large majority, Moslem Albanian. What proportion of Slav blood there may be (one should perhaps say, is) in these Albanians is of purely ethnographical interest and politically of no importance. Albanian predominance is proved by the fact that—so far as my experience goes, and I tried repeatedly—the Albanians are almost solely Albanophone, whereas the scattered Serbs usually speak both languages, and when addressed in Serb often replied at first in Albanian. Were it not for the support and instruction that has for long been supplied from without it is probable that the Serb element would have been almost, if not quite, absorbed or suppressed by this time. It has been an elemental struggle for existence and survival of the strongest, carried out in relentless obedience to Nature's law, which says, "There is not place for you both. You must kill—or be killed." Ineradicably fixed in the breast of the Albanian—of the primitive man of the mountain and of the plain—is the belief that the land has been his rightly for all time. The Serb conquered him, held him for a few passing centuries, was swept out and shall never return again. He has but done to the Serb as he was done by.

The celebrated Canon of Tsar Stefan Dushan throws light on the means employed to crush the conquered, when Great Serbia was at its greatest. "Tsar Dushan, the Macedonian, Autocrat of Serbia, Bulgaria, Hungary, Wallachia, and other countries.... Laws established by the grace of God in the year 1349 at a meeting of the Patriarchs, &c.

"Law 6. As to the Latin heresy, and those that draw true believers to its faith. The ecclesiastical authorities must strive to convert such to the true faith. If such a one will not be converted.... he shall be punished by death. The Orthodox Tsar must eradicate all heresy from his state. The property of all such as refuse conversion shall be confiscate.... Heretical priests of other communions who try to make proselytes will be sent to the mines or expelled the country. Heretical churches will be consecrated and opened for priests of the Orthodox faith.

"Law 8. If a Latin priest be found trying to convert a Christian to the Latin faith he shall be punished by death.

"Law 10. If a heretic be found dwelling with Christians he shall be marked on the face and expelled. Any sheltering him shall be treated the same way."

It appears also that certain pagan rites were still observed. Law 45 enacts that: "If there be heretics that burn the bodies of the dead, or dig them up for the purpose of burning them, the village where this takes place is to pay a fine, and the criminals be handed over to justice."

The fact that the whole "village" is fined (just as the whole "house" is excommunicated to-day, for the sin of concubinage with a sister-in-law), indicates that the whole village, if not wholly pagan, had pagan sympathies.

These laws imply no worse religious persecution than the whole of Europe has enjoyed at various times. On other subjects Dushan's laws are often good, and even in advance of their time.

But history shows that the Latins in the districts we are considering must have been mainly Albanians. The persecution was therefore not merely religious but racial. And that special legislation was needed against the Latins, and the express mention of what is to be done with their churches, tends to show that even in the strongest Servian days they were numerous enough to have to be reckoned with as a danger. The Serb strove to stamp out—or, shall we say, Slavise—the Albanian. The Albanian, circumstances being changed, has done as he was done by. He has employed mediæval methods, for this is the land of the Living Past, and he has forced back the Serb tide. Kosovo-polje is Albanian.

Its borders, however, are still largely Serb. Roughly speaking, the territory between the railway and the Servian frontier is Serb. It at any rate has a large Servian majority, but there is a remarkable Catholic island in and around Janjitzza, not far from the monastery of Grachanitzza. In this district were silver mines worked, it is said, with much success, from the beginning of the thirteenth century. The present Catholic inhabitants are reported to be the descendants of the Italian colony settled there as miners. They now call themselves Albanian. I do not know enough of the district to offer an opinion on the subject. But it is an odd fact that, before hearing this tradition, I met a man whom I took, beyond doubt, to be an Italian, and he proved to be a Janjitzza man.

From Mitrovitza to the Servian frontier is also mainly Servian, though the town and environs of Novi-bazar is largely Albanian. Beyond Novi-bazar the sanjak is practically solid Serb, Moslem, and Christian—no other race has any justifiable claim to it.

The Albanian has swept the centre of Kosovo vilayet. The Serbs are thick only along the Servian frontier and near the Montenegrin frontier, especially around Berana and Ipek. East of Prizren they begin to predominate. The land becomes more and more Slavonic. At which point Serbs turn into Bulgars is beyond the scope of this book. It is, I think, the fashion to draw the line too far westward.

Mitrovitza may be called a "frontier" town. Albanians and Serbs alike claim it jealously. Austria (to gain her private ends) wins Albanian support by promising that never, never will she allow the sanjak to become Serb.

The town looked so peaceful that it was hard to believe that but six years ago it had been the scene of fierce fighting, in which Shtcherbina, the Russian Consul forced into the place in the teeth of Albanian opposition, was killed. Of his gallantry on behalf of the Slav interests that he was sent to protect there can be no question, nor of the indiscretion, alas! with which he set to work. Austria at once planted a consul to watch her own interests; and there the two most interested Powers watch to this day.

Just outside the town is a relic of the Serb empire—the fine ruins of the castle of Zvechana. Here, in 1336, was strangled King Stefan Dechanski, son of Milutin, the founder of Grachanitzza. Stefan was Milutin's eldest son, but the young Byzantine Princess, his second wife, bore him another son and plotted to make him heir. In a fight that ensued Stefan was taken prisoner, and his stepmother prevailed upon his father to cast him into prison, where, to make matters sure, she ordered him to be blinded with red-hot irons. When freed after many years, behold he was not blind at all! The tale spread that he had been miraculously cured. He came to the throne with a great reputation for piety, and was the builder of many churches, notably the very beautiful white and pink marble church of Dechani—a thank-offering for the subjugation of the Bulgarians, whom he defeated in 1330.

His death is said by some to have been brought about by his son and heir, the great Stefan Dushan, but the patriotic Serb denies this. He was canonised as St. Stefan Dechanski, and his wonder-working shrine, pictured with his strangulation, draws many pious pilgrims still to the marble church of Dechani. Moslem and Catholic are in awe of it. Even the wild Catholic tribesmen of Nikaj tramp thither for the little round loaves of holy bread there distributed, and consider "By the bread of Dechani" a binding oath.

Mitrovitza has little else to show. To leave it, I had to have my teskereh stamped. The official at the konak, in order to make a good job of it, licked the stamp three times and licked off all the gum. As it would not stick, he licked it four more times. As it still would not, he put it in his mouth and sucked it patiently. It then showed signs of melting altogether, so he called a colleague to advise. He suggested the gum-pot. They searched for it high and low, and called in a third official—luckily that day there was no press of business in that department. The gum was found and the stamp stuck. It took half-an-hour, but was thoroughly done in the end. And we left by rail for Ferizovich, where we arrived at 10.15 A.M. A Serb fellow-passenger pointed out, on the right of the line just before Prishtina, the hill to which Vuk Brankovich, Tsar Lazar's traitorous son-in-law, withdrew with his men and gave the victory to the Turk. "What askest thou of Vuk the accursed! Cursed be he, and curst be he that begat him. Cursed be his stem and his seed. He betrayed his Tsar at Kosovo. He deserted with twelve thousand men."

Ferizovich, till lately, had been of importance merely as a railway station. Now it is of historic interest as being the spot upon which the casting vote was thrown—the spot from which the voice came, "Let there be a Constitution." And there was a Constitution, and all Europe was shaken.

"Constantinople is the key of the Near East; Albania is the key of Constantinople," say the Albanians. European plans for tinkering and "reforming" the Turkish empire have all ignored the Albanian, his rights, and his aspirations—and they have all failed. Outsiders might make this mistake. Those within the empire knew that, so far as Turkey in Europe is concerned, the side that could enlist the Albanians, solid, must "come out top."

The Young Turks' secret was well kept; but it would appear that certain Old Turks suspected something was brewing. One of these, Shemshi Pasha, sent mounted messengers through the Moslem tribes, summoning them at once to repel the attack of an expected enemy. One of the many men from whom I heard the tale persisted that the advance-guard of the Austrian army, forty battalions, ready on the frontier, had actually been seen, and that Austrian annexation had been imminent. The tribesmen flew to arms and hurried—some nine thousand strong—to the appointed spot, Ferizovich, where they were to receive orders. And there they fired on a train—reported to contain "enemies."

But Shemsi Pasha was "a day behind the fair." The Young Turks outwitted him. They shot him at Monastir; skilfully took advantage of the fact that the tribesmen were at Ferizovich; called on them to save the country, and explained that something called Constitution was the only way by which it could be done. The fierce, ignorant tribesmen, jealous only of their privileges and territorial rights, and absolutely unaware that this was not the job for which they had been originally summoned, loudly and unanimously demanded this unknown amulet, "Constitution," that was to keep their land intact, and save the Padishah.

The Sultan heard that the Moslem tribesmen—the men upon whom, above all others, he had always reckoned—were with the army. The game was up; he succumbed at once, and the Constitution was granted. That the main outline of this tale, which I found widely spread and

believed, is correct, I believe is beyond all reasonable doubt. The tribes were tricked, and many folk had already found this out when I arrived in Djakova.

Such freedom as they had retained under the Old Turk, they did not mean to be swindled out of by the Young.

We arrived at Prizren to find it smiling sardonically. Four Frenchmen had come to report on "the Constitution"—had come and gone.

"What did they see here?" I asked. "Nothing. They only dined, and left next morning for Djakova. One is in the Diplomatic Service, so of course they will not be allowed to see anything. The Young Turks have arranged it all. An escort of twenty-four suvarris, as a guard of honour, is with them, to prevent them talking to the wrong people, and a suvarri has been sent ahead to prepare a deputation of 'Christians rejoicing under the Constitution,' in case they wish to make inquiries. The escort will 'protect' them all the way. They will think they have done something very brave, and will report most favourably in the French newspapers." And they did.

end text

* Footnote: (Comment: According to the Turkish census 1837-1838 the population of Prizren was as follows in percents:

Serbs 65%
Albanians 24,8%
Cincars 7,86 %
Gypsies 2,35%

During the XIX century the Serb Christian population was rapidly decreasing due to extremely great pressures and terror of Albanian Moslems and Ottoman authorities.