

TODAY IS KOSOVO DAY, GREAT SERBIAN ANNIVERSARY

Date of Defeat of Serbia's Christian King Sacred Still to His People—Visit to Historic Plain Where the Battle Was Fought Five Centuries Ago

This is Kosovo Day. Churches of all denominations in New York will hold special services to observe the Serbian national anniversary. What the Battle of Kosovo means to the little Balkan nation, and what the associations are that cling about the plain where it was fought, are told in the following article:

By NME. SLAVKO GROUITOH.
EVERY one you talk with about this war will tell you it began on July 28, 1914, when Austria attacked Serbia; everybody, that is, except a Serb. He will tell you it began in 1389, when the Turks, who had already established themselves in Thrace with their capital at Adrianople, under the leadership of their Sultan, Murad I., sent a challenge to the Serbian Tsar to come out and meet him in a decisive battle on the plain of Kosovo.

It was on that plain in October, 1912, that the Serbian troops under King Peter avenged the defeat of 1389, thereby liberating from Turkish rule that part of Old Serbia and Macedonia which had not been reached in the earlier Serbian wars for independence—which, beginning in 1804 under the grandfather of the present King, were finally successful in 1878—including Bosnia and Herzegovina, which, however, were unjustly wrested from Serbia by the Treaty of Berlin.

The legends which overlie the historical facts of the battle of Kosovo are among the most beautiful of the poems of chivalry. Their elevation of tone, their Christian and martial idealism, are unsurpassed. The fact that the battle was a defeat seems only to have quickened the Serbian soul to greater intellectual efforts. The Serbians themselves explain this by a legend. It and the other poems in this article are from Noyes's and Bacon's "Heroic Ballads of Serbia." On the morning preceding the battle Tsar Lazar took communion at the Church of Grachtenisa, where at the moment of consecration an angel appeared unto him, saying:

"O King, whom the Serbs revere,
Wilt thou choose for thine own the
Kingdom of God,
Or an earthly empire here?
If, instead of a heavenly rule,
Thou chooseth an earthly realm,
Leap astride thy steed,
Belt about thee the girdle of war,
Tighten in the girth of thy steed,
And sheer shalt thou slaughter the Turk
Till he beg of thee to share with him the
conquest of this world.

But if thou chooseth the Kingdom of
God's own,
Take of Christ the white bread and the
wine,
And marshal thy army of Serbs to a
Life Everlasting,
And upon that dreadful day in the van
of the war thou shalt die, O Tsar,
With the whole of thine array."

When the Tsar heard the holy words
His thoughts came two and two.
"Dear God, what is the whole Thing
heart and what is the deed to do?
Which shall I hold for the better realm?
Man's sovereignty may die,
But the Kingdom of the living God,
Its power goes on for aye."

The Turks smote down Tsar Lazar
With the edges of the brand.
Seven and seventy thousand men lay
dead upon the sod,
All gallant Serbs,
And their pure blood was dear unto
their God.

The scene in which Tsar Lazar accepts defeat and raises his sword in the form of a cross to the Most High has been most admirably represented in a medallion, "The Spirit of Serbia," by Anna Coleman Ladd, an American sculptress.

Those who have wondered at the noble resignation and poise of the Serbian nation under defeat ever since their country was invaded in 1915 by the Austro-German and Bulgarian forces, during which Kosovo was again the scene of a great battle, in which the Serbians were defeated by overwhelming odds, should have witnessed their serenity in the Autumn of 1912, in those days of national rejoicing, when hourly bulletins brought news of victories over regions which ever since the first battle of Kosovo the Serbian people had mourned the loss of; every child, male or female, had been pledged at birth by parents, Church, and State to liberate from Turkish rule the lands where for centuries before their overthrow on Kosovo their people had prospered in learning and magnificence under Christian rulers with whom French Kings and Venetian doges sought alliances and treaties, sealed by the hands in marriage of Princesses of the royal blood.

To the Serbian of 1912 the overwhelming success of his armies in the first battle of that war, while hoped for, was considered miraculous in its completeness of revenge for Kosovo. The dismay and chagrin of the Turks was shared by their present allies, who yet waited until better prepared to join in the attack. The positions for the battle had been chosen by the Turks themselves, or their German Commander in

Chief, General Liman von Sanders. The Turkish Army was equipped entirely with German small arms, artillery, and ammunition. The Serbian armament was as French as it is today, but its leaders had been trained in all the military schools and universities of Europe, its army being officered by the flower of the intellectual classes of the whole kingdom, to which were added many volunteers from all the Macedonian and Jugoslav provinces. The plain of Kumanovo, where the Turkish Army attacked the Serbian frontiers, corresponds to the plain of Kosovo as one end of a long tunnel to the other, and the plain of Monastir, where the Serbians and their allies are now fighting, may be described as a continuation of that tunnel. (Only the first section of which is yet built, being the railway line from Skoplye to Ferisovitch.) the second section being lengthened by snowcapped mountains, high plateaus, and unnavigable rivers, whose basins in Autumn are lakes and bogs of mire, into which horsemen and artillery sink as in a Hindenburg dream.

The battle of Kumanovo raged from Oct. 20 to 26, date of the triumphal entry into Skoplye, Serbian's ancient imperial capital. Ten days later King Peter, at the head of his victorious army, accompanied by his officers of State, made a solemn pilgrimage to the battlefield of Kosovo, whither they were followed by hundreds of Serbian women and children singing national songs, strewing flowers, there where in the Springtime grow the wild peonies which, once white, have been red ever since that day, June 15, 1389, when they were dyed crimson with the blood of Serbian heroes fallen in battle. Behind the army came the priests of the Orthodox Church, bearing crosses and banners and great church bells with which to rededicate the ancient church and monastery of Grachtenisa.

One who lives in a Serbian house will soon become familiar with the legends of Kosovo and of Marco Kraljevich, a contemporary of Lazar and his knights, but who for some reason which the ancient chronicles do not explain was not among the Dukes and Princes who led their hosts to Kosovo. None the less, he seems to have carried on a private war of his own until his death. Even then, the legend says, he went to sleep promising to wake again when Serbia should strike to free herself from Turkish rule.

Marco's domain was at Prilip on the Shar Mountains, above Monastir. Ruins of his castle still exist, and in 1912 the Serbian troops battling for the capture of Prilip suddenly made a dash right at the enemy under the fire of their own barrage, unheeding the signal from the officers to fall back, because, they said, Prince Marco on his white horse had appeared and was commanding them to advance.

The compelling influence of these legends over the Serbian mind and character was demonstrated to me in the early days of October, 1912, in my own home, then, the Serbian Legation in London. For weeks the war cloud, that had been dispelled after the Agadir incident, again darkened the horizon of diplomatic chancelleries, and those who knew whispered that Turkey was being urged by Germany and Austria to attack the Balkan Block which France and Russia had built up for the greater safety of Europe from a monarch mad with desire for Mediterranean conquest.

One day a party of Serbian officers who were in London on a mission for the Government came to our legation to say good-bye before leaving for the front, war with Turkey being inevitable. My husband then told me for the first time that as an officer in the Reserve Guards he had applied for leave to join his regiment. That afternoon the answer came. It was that he was to remain at his diplomatic post. Upon reading the telegram he burst into tears and kept repeating over and over the lines of Czar Lazar's curse on those who went not to battle on Kosovo:

Who springeth of a Serbian house, in
whom Serb blood doth run,
Who cometh not to battle at Kosovo,
may he never have a son,
And no child of his heart whatever!
May naught grow under his hand,
Neither the yellow liquor, nor the white
wheat in the land!
May he like iron be rusted, and his
stock dwindle away!

Victory succeeded victory in the triumphal progress of the Serbian Army, from Kumanovo to Kosovo, past Pristina, Mitrovitz, and Ferisovitch, up to Prizrend the Magnificent, with its noble castle, as imposing as Windsor and Carcassonne, thence across the Albanian Alps to Durazzo on the Adriatic, while another army operating from Skoplye drove the routed Turks through Veles up over the Babouna, past Prilip and Bacra na Gumno, down to Monastir, on to Ochrida, Struga, Mista to Scutari on the Boiana, where the tired Turks surrendered after a siege of several months.

As I watched the little flags which my husband after each successful battle pinned on the map hanging over his desk grow in number, the strangeness of all those geographical names, known to me only through the legends of Kosovo, and the recent events, stirred within me a sense that something remarkable which concerned me vitally was happening without my being there to see it. So one day I announced to my husband that I was going on a pilgrimage to Kumanovo, Kosovo, and all the other names on his map. It seemed unfair, because he was still tied to his post by the sessions of the Peace Conference, of which he was Secretary, and at the later sittings of which the Bulgarian delegates had been uttering jealous protest because Serbia dared to claim as her own the Macedonian regions which her own army had liberated without the aid of a single Bulgar, while, on the other hand, 50,000 Serbian troops had aided Bulgaria to capture Adrianople from the Turks after a long

siege. The irresistible call of the legends was in my blood, and so early in April I left London for Belgrade en route to Kosovo, in company with several friends, one of them a distinguished English writer on Serbian historical and political matters, arriving in the Serbian capital just in time to witness the celebration of the fall of Scutari. The celebration consisted principally in the whole population parading in front of the King's palace and acclaiming the leaders of the army with shouts of "Long live Kosovo!" so indissolubly linked was their past with their present.

It is a night's journey from Belgrade to Kumanovo by train. At that time we were unaccustomed to the sight of many men in military uniform, and the throngs of them that lined the railway station gave it an unfamiliar air. Beyond, on the plain, were hundreds of tents, with men lying about on the grass or starting off with agricultural implements to cultivate the fields, April being the planting season. General Rasich, who visited America this last Winter as a member of the Royal Serbian Mission, was in command. As guests of the nation, the English visitors were asked to review the 60,000 troops of the cantonment. Splendid-looking men they were, smiling and satisfied with the victories they had won over their hereditary enemy. His Royal Highness, our Crown Prince, received our party in his tent, looking every inch a veteran in spite of his only 22 years. When congratulated upon the splendid success of the armies, of which he was Commander in Chief, he answered simply: "My men were all soldiers, and Kosovo was the prize for which they fought."

A number of officers volunteered to show us over the battlefield, explaining the wonders of the machine gun, of which every one in my party heard for the first time, so unfamiliar in those days was the lay mind with military matters. The delight of the conversation was a boy Lieutenant's description of the accuracy of the "Srbska brometka pookhka"—in plain English, a Serbian quick-firing rifle. With map in hand, all talking at once, they described the action during the days and nights when they battled, sometimes in the fog and at other times by moonlight, against an enemy of whose numbers they could only guess, so sudden had been the contact of the two advancing armies. They realized only when the battle was over that they had met and conquered the main body of the Turkish-Macedonian forces. Colonel Nedelkovitch, one of the heroes of the combat, told us it was a battle of Lieutenants, by which he meant that many officers directed an individual battle of equal importance, unconnected with the main action through lack of communication and contact with the higher command.

From Kumanovo to Skoplye by train is but an hour in distance; in difference it is a continent. The great square about the railway station was crowded with Turkish fezzes and veiled women, many of them with packs on their backs or bundles in their hands, waiting for the train for Saloniki, whence by ship they would depart for Constantinople in search of the son or husband who, having departed with the army months before, had not since been heard of. It

was my first glimpse of what an invaded country is like, for, in claiming her own from the Turks, Serbia had dispossessed many of the latter, who felt it as great a hardship for them to live under Christian rule as it had been for Christians to live under Moslem rule. Here were the headquarters of the high command.

Field Marshal Gen. Michitch and his command received us with the greatest cordiality, holding a banquet for us in what had been until recently a Turkish palace. When we arrived we passed to our places at the head of the table between rows of bowing, smiling officers, upon the breasts of most of whom glittered the medals and decorations of orders won in the battles of the preceding months. Some of them still bore traces of wounds, but all looked generally healthy, and the contented expression on their faces made one feel that it was a grand thing to belong to a victorious army.

The next day we took the train for Kosovo, the railway station of which is some little distance from the town of Pristina, where is a beautiful mosque in commemoration of the winning of the battle in 1389. My first exclamation was that I had been told that Kosovo was a plain, but it looked like an ocean—an ocean of billowy, flowering grasses and plants in which the blood-red peony predominated, with the yellow mustard, the white jonquil, and a kind of dwarf delphinium for contrast, a veritable Turkish carpet as far as the eye could see. Snow-capped mountains bordered the horizon beyond which lie Prizrend and the black Albanian Alps.

We had brought a volume of the poems of Kosovo with us. Sometimes the young Serbian diplomat who had been attached to our party by the Foreign Office at Belgrade read aloud from the original, translating what we could not understand. Sometimes, impatient to verify the scene for ourselves, we eagerly scanned the lines of Elodie Mijatovitch's translation, or the later one of Noyes and Bacon, all three American poets having succeeded in making beautiful drawings from themes which yet seem inexhaustibly richer in the original. All three writers speak of "level" Kosovo, and certainly a flatter stretch of land was never seen than this illimitable prairie guarded by high mountains.

Along the land of Kosovo flow Lab and Sinitza,
Onward from the mountain to the wood,
From the maple to Sazilaya, bridged
over by the Arch,
Through Zvechan and Chechan, to the
wood round Kosovo they march.

Farms, villages, and churches are lost in its vast expanse, and one comes upon them wondering why one had not perceived them from the distance.

The tomb of Murad, the Sultan, is watched over by dervishes, whose ancestors have lived on Kosovo since the days of the conquest. We visited a harem filled with women of every age and drowsy, crying children. Late in the afternoon we approached Grachtenisa. No words can describe the beauty of this pearl of Byzantine architecture, the frescoed walls of which are as fresh as yesterday, thanks to the white plaster with which the Turks had covered them to shut out the images of saints and Saviour, forbidden by the Moslem religion.