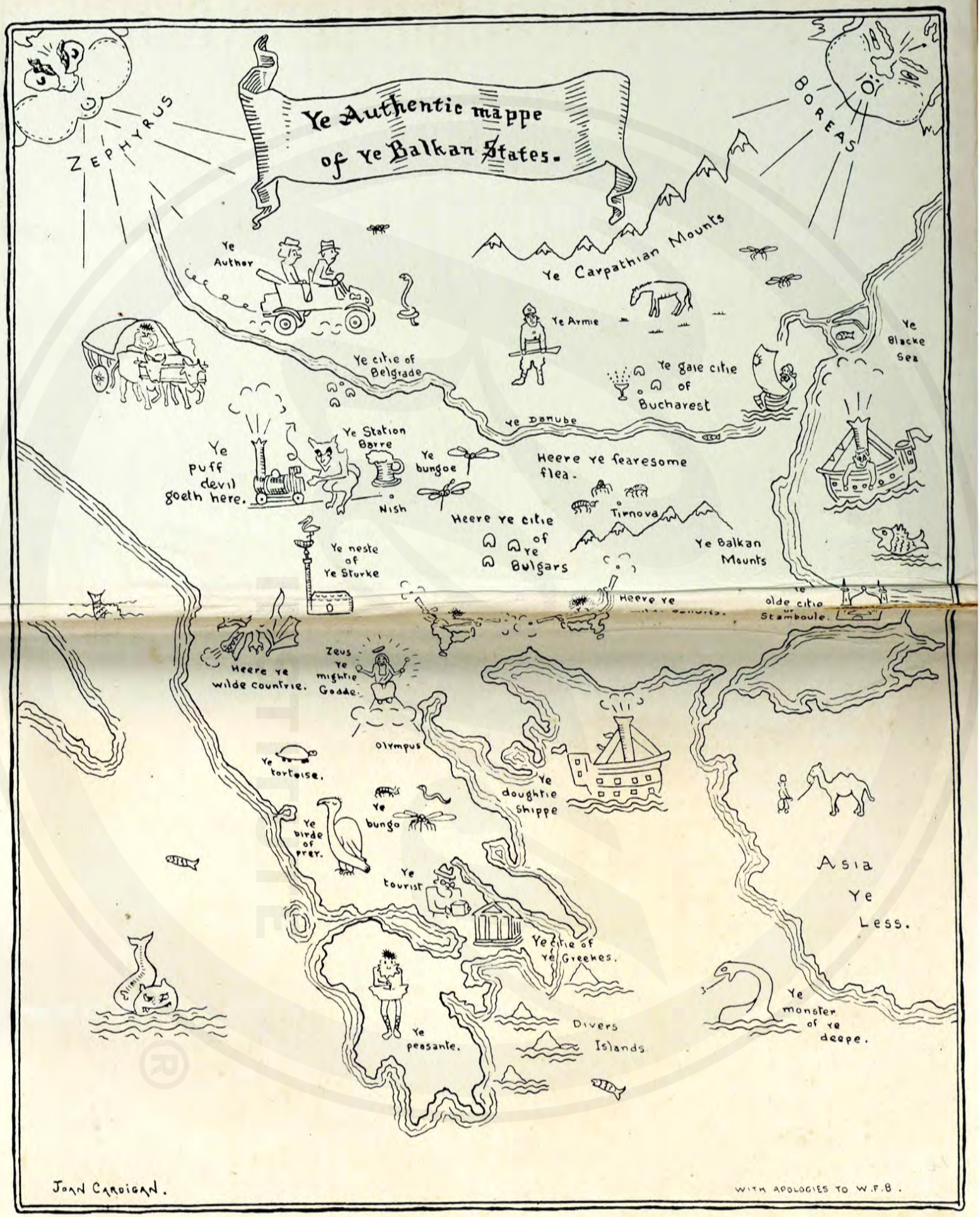
YOUTH GOES EAST

THE EARL OF CARDIGAN

NASH & GRAYSON

YOUTH GOES EAST


Ye Authentic mappe of ye Balkan States.
ZEPHYRUS
BOREAS
Ye Author
Ye Carpathian Mounts
Ye Armie
Ye Blacke Sea
Ye citie of Belgrade
Ye gaie citie of Bucharest
ye Danube
Ye puff devil goeth here.
Ye Station Barre
Nish
Ye bungoe
Heere ye fearesome flea.
Heere ye citie of ye Bulgars
Tirnova
Ye Balkan Mounts
Ye neste of Ye Sturke
Heere ye
olde citie Stamboule.
Heere ye wilde countrie.
Zeus ye mightie Godde.
Olympus
Ye tortoise.
Ye bungo
Ye birde of prey.
Ye doughtie shippe
Asia Ye Less.
Ye tourist
Ye citie of ye Greekes.
Ye peasante.
Divers Islands
Ye monster of ye deepe.
JOAN CARDIGAN.
WITH APOLOGIES TO W.F.B.

YOUTH GOES EAST

BY
THE EARL OF CARDIGAN

PRESS COPY.

LONDON
EVELEIGH NASH & GRAYSON
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PREFACE

It is usually considered necessary by authors, and especially by those who, like myself, are for the first time bursting into print, to make some apology or explanation for inflicting themselves upon a long-suffering public. This foreword, preface or introduction generally takes the form of a dissertation upon the author's motives in entering upon his self-imposed and monumental labours.

My own motives are easily explained. On my return from my continental wanderings, someone, presumably bored by the verbal recitation of my exploits, said to me: "Why don't you write a book?" At the time I could think of no good reason for refraining, and so, in the fullness of time, the deed was done.

This lack of profound thought is perhaps the only merit that the book can claim. It is not instructive, it comes to no conclusions, its theories are of no value to any one at all. In a word, it is merely the record of three rather inconsequent young people wandering about with a car in the more remote and less civilised parts of Europe.

We now come to the vexed question of the dedication. All really good books must be dedicated to someone, but in this case there are three aspirants for

that honourable mention. I might, in the first place, dedicate my brain-child thus :—

TO MY WIFE
BUT FOR WHOSE DEVOTION
IN COOKING EGGS
OVER A SPIRIT LAMP
IN A HIGH WIND
THE AUTHOR MIGHT NOT HAVE SURVIVED TO WRITE
THIS BOOK.

Or thus :—

TO HENRY
BUT FOR WHOSE PECULIAR SENSE OF HUMOUR
THIS BOOK MIGHT HAVE BEEN
A GREAT DEAL DULLER THAN
IT REALLY IS.

Or again thus :—

TO "MIRANDA"
BUT FOR WHOSE UNFAILING RELIABILITY
THE AUTHOR MIGHT STILL BE
SOMEWHERE IN MACEDONIA
MESSING ABOUT WITH
A SPANNER.

Miranda was the car, a 15·9 h.p. Morris Oxford, to be more precise, and those who, with true British pertinacity, read on as far as my later chapters dealing with adventures in the Balkans, will realise how nobly she bore her part in making the expedition a success.

Comparisons are proverbially odious, for which reason I propose to shirk the invidious task of allotting the palm of merit to any one of my chief supporters during our arduous 8,000 mile trek from corner to corner of a continent. For better or worse, my dedication will have to stand in its present unconventional and three-fold form.

YOUTH GOES EAST

CHAPTER I

HOLLAND

WE LEAVE ENGLAND ON THE FIRST STAGE OF OUR LONG JOURNEY TO CONSTANTINOPLE

"ORGANISATION," said Henry, "is what we require." A committee meeting was in progress, and the subject under discussion was the possibility of three totally inexperienced travellers being able to find their way unassisted over some thousands of miles of road between London and Constantinople. I think we had all three begun to realise that the proposition was not quite such a simple one as it had at first appeared.

Age and experience are generally considered two essential qualifications for a venture of this description. In both of these we were singularly lacking. Our combined ages barely overtopped the humble score of 65, and, so far as experience was concerned, the South of France may be taken as being the farthest point

attained in our previous travels. In any event, however, the attempt was to be made.

We set ourselves, accordingly, to organise the personnel of the expedition as best we might, allotting to each member of the party some specific duty. For my part, I undertook to drive the car, to deal with all questions of applied mechanics, and to grapple with that complicated mass of papers which was to enable us to pass, without let or hindrance, across the frontiers of no less than ten different countries. The " passports " required of motor cars travelling in Europe are both complex and bulky in the extreme !

My wife, as was natural, resolved to concern herself mainly with our bodily welfare, making herself responsible for such catering as was required and supplying clean sheets and other luxuries when the need arose. She volunteered also to relieve me occasionally at the wheel.

As for Henry, in his capacity of map-reader to the expedition it was felt that he would be kept fairly busy. In addition, he undertook to make himself conversant with foreign coinages and to learn up a few words of German. The latter, unfortunately, was a language of which all three of us were profoundly ignorant, although we all possessed a smattering of French.

Our luggage also required careful organisation. It was necessary to economise space to the utmost, and yet to carry a two months' supply

of clothing. We finally succeeded, by an intensive process of elimination, in confining ourselves to the equivalent of two small suitcases apiece. We had still, however, to find room for two reserve springs, a case of spare parts (which, by the way, were never actually needed), a typewriter, a tea basket, a dispatch case containing valuables, a reserve supply of oil, and a small mountain of overcoats and rugs. Truly an impressive load for a medium-sized car to carry !

Personally, I am afraid that I caused some annoyance to my fellow travellers by my choice of personal luggage. I have always been bad at packing, and consequently like to take about with me an ancient handbag of uncertain shape and possessed of an infinite capacity for expansion. This, to me, invaluable relic has always been regarded by my friends as a disgrace, for its seams have long since given way, so that the lining and part of the contents bulge out freely and without restraint. The real beauty of the thing is that it will always hold just one or two things more, but this the unthinking are apt to overlook.

What caused an even greater display of bitterness was the fact that, when fully loaded, my handbag becomes very nearly spherical in shape and consequently will not fit into any conventional space. I was firm, however, and declined to discard it, for, after all, anything is better

than paper parcels, and that is what I should otherwise have been reduced to!

As may be imagined, the loading of the car was a somewhat complicated business. After a few days' practice we were able to perform this feat within four or five minutes, but there were moments during the first attempt when we really felt tempted to despair. Once we thought that we had everything fixed, only to find that we had forgotten Henry, or rather that we had left him about six inches of cushion to sit on! The net result was that we started about an hour behind our schedule.

We passed through London in safety, for which I, as driver, was profoundly grateful. I have always considered myself fairly competent in traffic, but on this occasion I was haunted by the fear of some ridiculous anti-climax. It would indeed have been somewhat ludicrous if our trip to Constantinople had ended in a mere fracas with a suburban tram! Nothing of the sort occurred, however, and it was only when we were well on our way to Harwich that Henry's vaunted organisation met with its first reverse.

It was all due to over-enthusiasm in the map-reading department. One would have thought that the verdict of the mile stones might have been sufficient, but no; Henry must needs pull out an enormous map of Northern Europe, some three or four feet in length and broad in proportion, in order to keep us informed of our distance

from the port. His researches were not reassuring, for, with a couple of hours only in hand, he startled us by announcing that we had something like a hundred miles to go!

I feel sorry for Miranda when I think of that next half hour. I trod on the "gas" firmly, and we must have maintained a most notable average speed. This made me all the more annoyed when I spotted a signpost saying "Harwich 15½"! Of course it is quite true that one expects to find a map of England marked in miles, but if it forms part of a sheet entitled "Northern Europe" no one can cavil at the kilometre being employed.

The business of embarking at Harwich presented no difficulties at all. Everything, in fact, was quite distressingly simple and prosaic. Mindful of the hour at which we were due to land next morning, we retired early to our cabins, and, the weather being kind, slept peacefully and well.

* * * * *

I always think it a pity that steamship companies will insist on depositing their patrons on a foreign strand at approximately five or six a.m. It is all very well if it happens to be a glorious summer morning, with the sunshine pouring down out of a cloudless sky, but what if it should be cold and grey and drizzling with rain? The visitor can hardly fail

to form an unfavourable, and probably an unjust, opinion of his new surroundings.

All this is beside the point, however, for in our case it *was* a glorious summer morning and the sunshine *was* pouring in its best manner out of a sky almost entirely devoid of cloud. Thus it was that, even at that uncivilised hour and before we had had anything worth calling a breakfast, we took an instant liking to the land that lay before us. In justice to Holland, I should also add that we continued to like it even after we had seen it on a subsequent occasion under a shroud of rain.

The Dutch landscapes that are so familiar to most of us give only an incomplete idea of the country as it actually is. Holland is a great deal brighter and more colourful than it is usually depicted, although in other respects its attractions have been adequately portrayed.

The windmills are still very much in evidence, although not all of them are working. So are the canals and the cobbled streets. The peasants still wear clogs in preference to boots, and the dogs are still to be seen dragging the little milk carts while their masters clump along behind. In short, Holland still lives up to the stranger's conception of it; being really slightly more attractive on close acquaintance than it is in the average Englishman's imagination.

The Dutch people, moreover, are pleasant and friendly, with a quiet, restrained manner that

is more English than Continental. The Dutch police, for example, are very similar to their English counterparts, even in the matter of costume. They control the traffic calmly and with efficiency, and are always polite and helpful to the stranger. The emotional outbursts popularly attributed to the Continental gendarme are completely foreign to their nature.

Our business with the customs officials at the Hook was speedily and pleasantly concluded, and we then set out on the short run of 20 kilometres to The Hague. This was the first occasion on which I had ever driven abroad, so that for the first few minutes I had to concentrate my full attention on learning anew the Rule of the Road. This, however, did not prove nearly so difficult a task as I had supposed.

Most people imagine that an English driver must need several days of practice before he can gravitate naturally to the right hand side of the road. Actually, he can become acclimatised to the new conditions in a very short time, since he has but to follow the example of the other vehicles that surround him. My own experience is that it is far easier to drive a car than to walk in the streets of a foreign town.

We breakfasted in The Hague at the "Central," a comfortable hotel outside the side entrance of which a car can be parked for any reasonable period. Feeling considerably restored, we spent

the remainder of the morning wandering round the Dutch capital and comparing notes on our observations.

I should, perhaps, explain at once, that there may be no misapprehension on the subject, that in the course of these and other wanderings around foreign towns and cities I have studiously avoided any reference to the popular guide books. Personally, I am far more interested in the daily life of a foreign community than I am in its dead and gone associations. This may seem a shallow view to take, but it is one that has at least one definite advantage.

After all, to those who are really well informed on historical and archæological subjects such dissertations as I could give would be of singularly little value. Conversely, it would be a dreadful thing if I were to inflict upon those whose interests lie elsewhere my trivial observations on the glories of the past.

The Hague as it is to-day impressed me vastly, and in several different ways. In the first place, it is one of the very few large towns in which one does not experience the feeling of being hemmed in by bricks and mortar. I am convinced that if the population of Poplar could be transported there *en bloc*, then Poplar would vote Conservative at the next election! It would be hard for Communism to flourish amid such ideal surroundings.

Even the poorer houses are clean and neat,

so that it is plain that each man takes a pride in making his dwelling just a little smarter and brighter than his neighbour's. The sum spent annually in The Hague on bright-coloured paint must run into a prodigious figure! Besides this, there are numerous public parks, beautifully laid out and amazingly free from litter, while the canals also do their share in keeping open spaces amid the most populous districts.

As for the suburbs, they give a new meaning to the word. Instead of the long rows of dismal semi-detached residences which offend the eye on the outskirts of all English towns, there are scattered groups of delightful little villas, each quite unlike and distinct from its neighbours, and each standing in a bright little patch of garden. They have that glorious virtue of individuality that is fast becoming extinct in post-war England.

Why is it, I wonder, that no English architect seems capable of building a small house that is not an offence to the surrounding landscape? Why must all English houses built during the present century be so intolerably depressing to the beholder? It is a pity that we cannot import someone from Holland to teach us how to put up a small villa of which the owner can feel justly proud.

Then again, The Hague is perhaps the cleanest of all important cities. It gives the impression that it has just been washed, polished, and

generally spring cleaned, and is about to be done again in a few days' time. The very tramcars shine with a spotless neatness, and the stranger feels that to cast so much as a cigarette end upon the pavements would be to commit a heinous crime!

The various royal palaces at The Hague are also, in their way, unique. Instead of the noble piles that one expects to see, cut off by armed guards, walls, and railings from the dwellings of less exalted folk, they stand among the other houses in the streets or squares, unrecognisable save for a single sentry at the door of each. The Queen of Holland thus lives among her subjects in a more literal sense than any other European monarch.

The stranger, failing to observe the sentry, might easily suppose that the two quietly dressed and unassuming ladies who occasionally emerge from one of these unpretentious buildings were merely the wife and friend of some wealthy city merchant. Only when he saw the passers-by raising their hats and bowing as they drive away in their open carriage would he realise that in one of them he had been looking upon the Queen.

I was told that the Royal Family is very popular among the Dutch, and this I can well believe. Their simplicity and lack of unnecessary display are two virtues very typical of Holland, or at least of the Holland that I saw

during my very brief passage through the country.

* * * * *

The same afternoon was one that I shall never forget. We decided to take the car and go for a run through the bulb-growing district in the neighbourhood of Leyden. By good fortune our visit had coincided with the season when the tulip fields are still in bloom.

I doubt if I can adequately describe the effect of the Dutch bulb fields as we saw them then. The humblest bed of tulips is a pleasant sight, but what of a broad field of these vivid blooms, some ten, or twenty, or thirty acres in extent?

There were times when the blaze of colour literally hurt the eyes! Wherever we turned were brilliant splashes of yellow and orange and red, positively dazzling in the sunlight.

The tragedy of the whole thing is that these blooms which delight the stranger are accounted absolutely worthless by the growers. To them the bulb is the only thing that matters, and they would be grateful to anyone who would cart the blooms away. Small boys collect a few, and sell them for a penny a bunch to any foreigners who may care to buy—bunches that would fetch from 2s. 6d. to 3s. on the London market!

What happens to the rest? It is only necessary to look at the corners of the bulb fields,

where great heaps of petals are piled and left to rot. Often the wind blows these petals wholesale into the canals, so that the water also is charged with vivid colour where they float. To the stranger such waste seems wicked, a wanton destruction of beautiful things, but the Dutchman merely shrugs his shoulders. His fields are his business, a commercial undertaking, and he cannot afford to treat them as a rich man treats his garden. Small blame to him if he concentrates his attention upon the unlovely but more profitable bulbs.

We left The Hague next morning *en route* for the German frontier, passing through Utrecht, Amersfoort, Deventer and Almelo. Although not actually oppressive, the day was hot, and I have very pleasant recollections of a halt we made at about midday in the neighbourhood of Utrecht. It was the sight of a small beer garden, very cool and shady, that lured us from the dust and bustle of the road.

In the matter of beer drinking we have much to learn both from the Germans and from the Dutch. In England the custom is to drink a heavy beer, to drink it at the bar of some stuffy and probably rather dingy "pub," and to have it served cool rather than definitely cold. Much of the charm of drinking beer is thereby lost.

In Germany or Holland it is in very different circumstances that the beer is drunk. The setting is usually a veranda looking out over a

well-kept patch of garden to the street beyond. Basket chairs are placed conveniently in the shade of an overhanging tree, and the beer itself is light and deliciously cool, having been kept on ice throughout the heat of the day. In addition to its other pleasant qualities, it is therefore as refreshing a beverage as a thirsty man can wish for.

It was towards evening when at last we reached the frontier, and we passed out of Holland with some feelings of regret. Personally, I made a mental resolve that I would one day return, and when I am old and grey and disillusioned I intend to do so. I shall take a little villa just outside The Hague, and pass my declining years amid an atmosphere of bulbs and beer.

CHAPTER II

GERMANY

RUNNING DUE EAST ACROSS THE GREAT PLAIN OF NORTHERN EUROPE

Our entry into Germany, although it was attended by no serious complications, was raised above the level of the commonplace by the obvious amusement which it afforded to customs officers concerned. As usual, it was Henry who involuntarily supplied what one may describe as the "comic relief," and his not unnatural desire to demonstrate his newly acquired familiarity with the German language must be held answerable for what ensued.

As is usual on these occasions, we had been asked to state the nature of the contents of our various packages and trunks. Personally, I should have been quite content to indicate the word "clothes" by some form of pantomime or dumb-show. Henry, however, must needs bring out one of the half-dozen German words that he had learnt, and of which he fondly imagined that he knew the meaning.

In common fairness one must, of course, admit

that the word "unterhosen" sounds very much as if it might mean just "underclothes" in a general sort of way. Actually it does not. It refers to one specific article of clothing and to nothing else.

I thought at the time that the officials looked vaguely surprised when Henry announced that one of our large suitcases was packed with "pants." "Anything else?" they asked. "No," said Henry firmly, "just 'unterhosen'; nothing else at all." They turned to the second suitcase and the third. In each case Henry gave the same reply.

I have always respected those German officials for their admirable restraint. They were given to understand that the entire car was loaded with a selection of gents' nether garments, yet they contained themselves in a way that was positively heroic. Only as we were moving off did I hear a rising crescendo of mirth proceeding from the frontier post behind us!

By this time dusk was falling, so that at Lingen we decided to stay the night, leaving ourselves a comfortable run to Hamburg on the morrow. Lingen is quite an unassuming little place, the sort of small country town that in England would provide only a very poor kind of accommodation for the traveller. Nevertheless, we fared quite reasonably well at the local hotel, the food being good and the bedrooms clean.

This is one of the great advantages of Germany

from the motorist's point of view. He can pull up for the night wherever he will, and yet be certain of securing his two most urgent needs, a square meal decently cooked and served, and an undisturbed night's rest. Better still, he will find that German hotel-keepers as a class are quite exceptionally intelligent people, always ready to try and discover what it is that their guests require, and, if possible, to supply it.

Another German virtue is that the stranger is seldom, if ever, overcharged, nor is any attempt made to take advantage of his ignorance of the language. The only complaint that the traveller will ever have to make is in regard to the peculiar and uncomfortable construction of the German type of bed. If he is wise, however, he will be sufficiently grateful to find that it is always scrupulously clean.

It is annoying, all the same, to wake up in the middle of the night and find that the balloon-like structure, a combined form of eiderdown quilt and sheet, which acts as a covering, has slipped aside, allowing three-quarters of one's person to remain exposed and freeze. Only after long practice is it possible to maintain this atrocity, which obstinately refuses to be tucked in at the sides, in a position where it affords any warmth or protection to the sleeper.

Continuing our run to Hamburg, we passed through Bremen over roads that varied between indifferent and good. It is a mistake commonly

made by English people who have toured only in the Rhineland to suppose that all German roads are uniformly good. Many of them, it is true, are excellent, but there are as many more that would, in this country, provoke a flood of protest from the motoring public. Within ten miles of a great city like Hamburg it is no uncommon thing for a series of ruts and pot-holes to demand a sudden application of the brakes.

Another fallacy is to suppose that the Germans are as far advanced as we are in the use of motoring as a means of transport. In Berlin you will see as many cars as you will in London, but in the remoter districts, such as the north-western and north-eastern sections of the country, a private car or a lorry is a comparatively uncommon sight. You will see ten cars on the country roads of England for every one that you will see in Germany's corresponding countryside.

Hamburg itself is a fine and thriving city, particularly well laid out. Instead of the mean and dingy streets through which, in this country, one approaches an important manufacturing centre, fine and imposing roadways lead from the suburbs to the business and residential quarters. A pleasant feature of the central part of Hamburg is the existence of broad sheets of water around which are open-air cafés and upon which the inhabitants can take their exercise or leisure in canoes or boats.

Out of business hours, the Hamburgian is a gay and care-free individual, very different from the German industrialist as he is generally depicted. Even in the early hours of the morning the streets of this city are never actually deserted, for the late revellers returning from one or other of the night clubs may be seen mingling with the first of the early risers on their way to work.

* * * * *

Our first stop after leaving Hamburg ought to have been Berlin. We started late, however, following a supper party that did not break up until an advanced hour of the previous night, and the variable nature of the roads prevented us from maintaining as good an average speed as we had hoped. We called a halt accordingly at Ludwigslust, an old-fashioned country town on the main Hamburg-Berlin road, and soon made ourselves comfortable at another of the unpretentious local inns with which this part of Germany abounds.

A stroll before dinner brought us to the old palace belonging, as we were told, to the Grand Dukes of Mecklenburg, around which Ludwigslust is built. This is a fine building, looking out over a waterfall to a pleasant strip of park, and the town itself seems to retain something of the old-world atmosphere that surrounds it.

At dinner we were able to some extent to

converse with the waiter who served us, he having some little knowledge both of English and of French. It was the former language, however, that he preferred to talk, for it seems that the English are far more popular with Germans of all classes than are the French. An amazing number of people all over the country, waiters, garage hands, policemen and others, are both able and willing to address the visitor from England in a very fair imitation of his native tongue.

Considering that ten years had not yet elapsed since the conclusion of the war, I was impressed also by the friendly manner in which I was invariably greeted by the ordinary people with whom I came in contact. When I say this I am not thinking of the various Germans to whom I had introductions, but rather of those whose acquaintance I made casually in restaurants or on the road. In every case that I can remember, these people, on learning that I was an Englishman visiting their country for the first time, seemed only too pleased to go out of their way to help me as best they could.

Many interesting and amusing conversations arose out of their kindly offers of assistance. Having acted as interpreter between myself and some garage hand or waiter, they would inquire as to my eventual destination, being naturally intrigued to learn that this was so far afield as Constantinople. Any further talk would be

conducted in a weird mixture of English, French and German, a few words of each being strung together to form some kind of an intelligible sentence, that must have been very diverting to anyone who happened to overhear it!

Wonderful is the assiduity with which the Germans will set themselves to acquire a knowledge of languages other than their own. I recollect on my return journey having a conversation with a schoolboy in a little village near the Rhine. His father kept a petrol pump at which I had drawn up. For some reason he addressed me first in French, and I, as was natural, replied in the same language to the best of my very meagre powers.

A puzzled look soon crept into the boy's face. "What province of France do you come from?" he inquired. "Your accent surely is not Parisian?" Somewhat flattered by his mistake, I explained that I came not from France but from England. Instantly, and apparently without effort, he changed from fluent French into equally fluent English.

This boy was aged about sixteen. I inquired the means whereby he had become so proficient in two different foreign languages at such an early age. He replied that he was in regular correspondence with boys of his own age in other countries, thus keeping himself in constant practice. How many English boys, I wonder, could display such industry as this?

Leaving Ludwigslust next morning, we soon completed the short remaining stage of our run to Berlin. Of the German capital much might easily be written, but to many English people its appearance is already sufficiently well known. We saw it first, however, under somewhat unusual conditions, for a great political demonstration was in progress, the main streets were lined by a dense but orderly crowd, and the police had turned out in full force to keep the peace.

It was evident that the authorities were fully prepared for any trouble that might arise as the great processions passed. It seemed strange to see police and soldiers standing with rifles and bayonets ready at every corner, for one does not readily associate the German temperament with promiscuous and violent outbursts. All remained quiet as it happened, or at least, if there was any disorder on this occasion, we saw nothing of it.

The Berlin policeman, although more military in appearance than his "opposite number" in London, is, in my experience, a pleasant and kindly individual, very far removed from the accepted type of the pompous Teutonic official. The latter I take to be an exclusively pre-war figure which has failed to survive the present democratic regime. I passed through different parts of Germany three times in all without ever meeting with anything other than courtesy from the officials with whom I had to deal.

In addressing a policeman it appears to be customary to raise one's hat, whereupon the officer will spring to attention, salute, and give any information that is desired. Only once did I incur the hostility of the Law, and that was when I omitted to observe some by-law regarding the conduct of motor traffic in a busy street. Even then a polite smile quickly took the place of scowls when it was realised that I was a foreigner who had erred through ignorance alone.

Our demands upon the kindness of newly-made acquaintances tended to be curious rather than severe. At our Berlin hotel one morning we received a caller who turned out to be a director of the German firm associated with Messrs. Shell of oil and petrol fame. This gentleman very kindly asked if he could be of assistance to us in any way during the German section of our tour. It would be a real pleasure, he assured us politely, if there was anything that he could do.

I was about to thank him and reply in the negative when my wife broke in. Yes, she replied naïvely, there was one great service that he could render her if he would be so kind. "But of course," he assured her gallantly, "Madame has but to ask." "Well, then," came the very feminine answer, "perhaps you could tell me the correct German term for a pair of pink bedroom slippers?"

Instantly mastering his astonishment at so strange a request, our polite friend lost no time in supplying the required information. Turning his mind swiftly from motoring to feminine accessories, he contrived within ten minutes to provide Lady Cardigan with a list so comprehensive as to cover her shopping activities during the remainder of our stay.

* * * * *

Leaving Berlin, we pushed on eastward, gradually passing out of the prosperous area around the capital into the rather dull and flat country towards the Polish border. Often great pine forests would stretch away on either side of the road, but their monotony would be relieved at times by open glades in which deer, chiefly roe deer, might be seen peacefully grazing, very little disturbed by the rising drone from the engine of the approaching car.

Other motorists were but rarely met with, but the roads, on the whole, proved tolerably good. Our chief troubles were due to the dust which, on a hot day, rises in vast clouds behind any vehicle moving at speed. Personally, I was lucky in having my luggage stowed in the back of the car, but many were the laments of the other members of the party whose suitcases were strapped on the luggage grid behind. It certainly is annoying to find copious layers of

grit nestling in the folds of one's small reserve of clothes!

I attempted one day to abate this nuisance by purchasing a large ground-sheet and tying it with string over the luggage grid section of our baggage. For some time this was regarded as an intelligent move on my part, and I was congratulated on my kindly forethought. The same evening, however, I was surprised to find that a new and unfriendly school of thought had suddenly arisen. It appeared that I had neglected to tie the string tightly enough, a portion of the ground-sheet had flapped down in front of the exhaust pipe, and a large percentage of the smoky fumes had been neatly diverted into the luggage, causing a deposit of pure carbon in place of the dust!

Our route towards Poland took us through Kustrin and Landsburg, the latter being a rather uninteresting small country town where we stopped for the night. It was near here that I was foolish enough to allow the car to run dry of petrol, having, I imagine, made a miscalculation between litres and gallons when previously filling up. We were lucky in coming to a standstill near a village, whereat Henry volunteered to walk on and purchase a couple of tins of "benzine."

It turned out, however, that this transaction was not to be so easy as we had supposed, and he created no little excitement among the in-

habitants before he was able to supply our needs. The only petrol available was sold from a pump, and there were no cans in which it could be transported.

Henry, who is not easily deterred, went at once to the nearest ironmonger's, saw a large garden watering can displayed, and bought it on the spot. He had some difficulty in preventing the shopman from wrapping it up, and also in explaining that he did not require the "rose" that is normally fixed on the end of the spout, but in the end he sallied forth, armed with his brand new watering can, and followed by a small crowd of deeply interested German children.

Returning to the petrol pump, he requested the bewildered owner to decant five litres of the spirit into this weird receptacle, passing off with a light laugh the obvious jokes that were made on the subject of gardening as a hobby for the amateur. He then hired a small boy to help him with his burden, and tramped back towards the stranded car.

Finally, to complete the joy of the ever-growing crowd that was following his movements, he emptied the watering can into the petrol tank and offered his recent purchase, its purpose now having been served, as a personal memento to the lad who had been carrying it along. I doubt if any eccentric millionaire has ever given a stranger "tip," or given it with greater dignity and grace!

Leaving Landsburg after quite a comfortable night at the local hotel, we were not long in reaching the Polish border. Here we found that the presiding official had retired for lunch leaving his office unattended, an example which we decided to follow ourselves. Turning off the road into a sheltered part of the pine woods, we were soon attacking our usual midday meal consisting of boiled eggs, rolls and butter, and bottled beer. Before us lay a country which, even in these days of universal travel, is comparatively little known to those who motor for pleasure abroad.

CHAPTER III

POLAND

OUR FIRST VENTURE INTO THE PRIMITIVE LANDS OF EASTERN EUROPE

POLAND, for all its post-war status of a separate state, still bears the traces of its divisions in the past. One half of it retains its semblance of a German province, while the other is left very much as it was in the days of the Russian domination. It was into the old German section that we penetrated first, our objective being Posen, a town of some importance and apparent wealth.

Conditions were kind to us on our first day's run over the Polish roads. The surface, although far from good, was not so bad as to impede us when travelling at moderate speeds. The weather was fair, although colder than we had hitherto known it, and the country seemed pleasant though totally flat. It is worthy of note that neither in Holland, North Germany, nor Poland did we see anything even faintly resembling a hill.

Posen is a pleasant, and at times even a gay,

little place. Of its gaiety we had heard from a friend who had stayed there on the occasion of the local motor show just prior to our visit. This function being over, however, the tide of visitors had ebbed, leaving the town to go about its business with its normal quiet and prosaic air.

We were somewhat disgusted when we arose next morning, for the air was cold and some flakes of snow were already beginning to fall. Considering that the month was May and we were on about the same latitude as Norfolk, I think that we had some excuse for feeling that the weather, which had been distinctly hot for the previous ten days, was playing us a dirty trick. It was in no very genial mood that we fastened the luggage on the back of the car, put up the side curtains and hood, and wrapped around us the coats and rugs which we had fortunately brought.

A long run lay before us, for we had determined to reach Warsaw before we called a halt. This modest ambition could have been fairly easily fulfilled provided the roads had remained in a reasonable state of repair. As it was they became worse and worse as our journey went on, so that our progress became steadily slower with every kilometre that took us farther to the east.

As we approached the borders of the old Russian province this deterioration became more marked. Soon Miranda was being bumped about

from one pot-hole to another to the intense discomfort of her occupants, notably of Henry, who was sitting at the back. It was plain that what was once a decent road had been pounded to destruction in the war, nor had the Poles made any attempt to restore it to its former state.

In the villages through which we passed the same atmosphere of decay could be observed. The houses were mostly in a tumble-down and dilapidated condition, the streets were filthy, the inhabitants seemed miserably poor, and their children were ragged, dirty, and unkempt. The wretched, half-starved appearance of the horses was almost more pitiable than that of their owners. It seemed, indeed, as if the Jews, sombrely clad and with patriarchal beards, were the only people who were moderately well supplied with this world's goods.

The fact is that the Russians, when they abandoned Poland, took with them everything of value on which they could lay their hands, both in securities and ready cash. The whole country was therefore left in an impoverished state, and has remained so ever since.

As an example of the poverty to which certain of the villages are reduced, I can recall one very unpleasant experience that befell us at a place called Kutno on the Posen–Warsaw road. We had stopped opposite a petrol pump in the open square around which the village is built, and had to wait a few minutes before the owner could

be found and induced to come and serve us. We were not altogether surprised when we saw that a large crowd was beginning to gather round us, travellers being rare in Poland and motor cars rarer still, but we were somewhat taken aback when we discovered that the entire crowd was composed of beggars, professional and amateur, young and old, men, women and children!

My wife had very prudently remained inside the car, but this did not prevent many of them from clawing at the windows in their quest for alms. As for Henry and myself, who were standing by the pump, we had a particularly uncomfortable time. The old women, some of them looking like fairy-tale witches, were far the worst. They went so far as to seize us by the arms the better to pour out their tales of woe into our unresponsive ears!

Personally, I was heartily glad when the owner of the petrol pump arrived and helped us to keep them at a distance. Needless to say, it would have been sheer folly to have given way to their appeals. The whole village would have turned out if it had become known that the (supposedly) rich strangers were handing out "zlotys" in the market square! This was one of the occasions when the wise man carefully stifles any charitable instincts that he may possess.

Our only regrets in leaving Kutno were due to the fact that the roads beyond were, if possible,

even fouler than before. Driving became increasingly more tiring for my wife and more exasperating for myself. A little ingenuity, however, showed us a method by which Henry, who cannot drive a car in the ordinary way, might come to our assistance and give us both a rest.

Standing on the running board, he would wait until I had set the car in motion, changed into top gear, and set the throttle to give a speed of some ten or fifteen m.p.h. Then, as I moved across into the passenger's seat, he would take the wheel and embark upon the arduous task of steering Miranda in and out and round about the worst of the gaping chasms in the road.

This he did with considerable success so long as the road remained open and flat. When narrow village streets required some more subtle form of driving and the use of the lower gears, the car would be stopped and I would resume control. However erratic our progress, it was at any rate a relief for me to be able to lean back and be jolted about rather than to have the responsibility of jolting other people.

Only those who have driven over really bad roads will appreciate my meaning here. The strain incurred is not physical but mental. Each shock and jar caused to the passengers is taken by the conscientious driver as a cause for self-reproach. He blames himself, possibly

quite unjustly, for his clumsiness in the handling of the car.

Darkness found us still far from our destination, the average running speed for the day having been miserably low. To make matters worse, the improved conditions which we had hoped for as we approached the capital failed entirely to materialise. On the contrary, the Warsaw district roads proved to be rather worse, if possible, than those which we had already had to face. Each kilometre meant a struggle; each yawning pot-hole brought a lurking fear that Miranda, sturdy as she was, might fall to bits before we could get to grips with our evening meal!

I decided at last to abandon the metalled road. This does not mean that I drove instead across the fields; merely that I turned aside on to the loose and sandy cart track that, as is usual in Poland, ran parallel to the main highway. To my delight, this proved to be rather smoother than the road. Some comparison may be gathered from the fact that on the cart track I was constantly able to drive in "top," whereas among the stones and pot-holes there were many stretches where I was reduced to third or even second gear. Such are the surfaces over which the Polish capital is to be approached!

From time to time we had to leave our cart track in order to overtake the peasants' carts which were plodding along, bearing vegetables

and other produce from the country to the town. The drivers were invariably asleep, yet the horses, mere skeletons with their bones almost breaking through the skin, stumbled onward like automata in the tracks of those ahead. Either the farmers mistrust the railways or else the rates must be exorbitantly high, for it seems that these long treks are regularly made between the hours of sunset and of dawn.

Warsaw, which we eventually reached at about ten or eleven o'clock at night, is in no sense of the word a prepossessing city. We approached it through an endless maze of mean, ill lit, and desolate streets, and even in some of the principal thoroughfares it would be possible for a careless motorist to break a spring. There are some fine buildings, it is true, but these are jostled and hemmed in by an incongruous medley of houses, mostly in a sadly dilapidated state.

Even when alighting at our hotel, moreover, we were by no means free from the attentions of the beggars. One old woman, bearing a marked resemblance to the aged hags of Kutno, rushed forward with an impassioned appeal as my wife got out. The latter, being by no means inclined to suffer a lengthy interview on the inevitable lines, promptly took to her heels, dodged smartly round behind the car, and made for the entrance at a very creditable rate of speed!

Warsaw hotels, judging by the one at which

we stayed, are designed more for magnificence than for actual comfort. The halls and stairways are built on an impressive scale, yet the passages, which seem to stretch for miles, cannot boast so much as a carpet to relieve their cold austerity.

We were able, however, when we had slept off the effects of a tiring day, to pass the remainder of our time in Warsaw pleasantly enough. We were asked one afternoon to meet the president of the local Auto Club, one of the earliest Polish motorists and the possessor of a fund of motoring anecdotes. One of the best of these, and incidentally one that throws a vivid light on the primitive mentality of the Polish peasantry, concerns an occasion when he was driving a car of antiquated type along a country road.

The engine was boiling merrily, as those ancient engines did, and he stopped at the first opportunity to ask an old woman to oblige him with a bucketfull of water from her well. To his amazement she stared at him aghast, screamed loudly, crossed herself, and ran for her life across the fields!

This astounding conduct was eventually explained by a superstition then quite widely held among the country folk, to the effect that Anti-Christ would one day appear in a chariot not drawn by horses or by any human means. It was for the Evil One that the unfortunate man had been mistaken!

As a legitimate sequel to this extraordinary tale, it is not altogether surprising to hear of the appalling fate that nearly overtook a family of wireless pioneers at about the time of our own experiences among the Poles. It seems that an educated man, living near one of the remoter villages, acquired a small receiving set to add to the amenities of rustic life. For a time this was regarded locally as a harmless, although a weird and inexplicable, device.

Then came a sudden thunderstorm, the worst that had been known for years. The wireless set survived, but some damage was done to cottages and farms. At once the infuriated villagers perceived the apparent cause of these mishaps. The wireless set was an instrument of the Devil, bringing misfortune for Christian people in its train!

The obvious solution lay in murdering the family on whom the blame was laid. An armed mob gathered and marched upon the house which still flaunted aloft its shameful aerial. No pains were spared in fitting out this expeditionary force. It numbered something over a thousand able-bodied men, knives and scythes being the weapons of their choice. A modern, or comparatively modern, note was struck by the machine-gun, rusty but imposing, which was drawn at the head of the column by oxen taken from the plough! There seems to be no doubt that not one of the occupants would have

survived had they not had the presence of mind to fling themselves down and pretend themselves already dead. Seeing the supposed corpses on the floor and the infernal machine standing upon a table, the villagers at once concluded that the wireless devil had turned and rent its masters, and so retired with their thirst for vengeance unappeased.

* * * * *

From Warsaw we turned back upon our tracks, running south-west towards the manufacturing town of Lodz. Considering that in Poland place names may easily achieve the complexity of the famous Przemysl, we anticipated no great difficulty in asking our way to a place so simple and straightforward in its spelling. Either "Lods" or "Lots," we thought, would immediately be understood.

We were soon to find, however, that we had underrated the peculiarities of the Polish method of pronunciation. Lodz is pronounced "Lwooch," or sometimes for simplicity as "Wooch," the accent being upon the owl-like "oo." Henry, our map-reader, on learning this became quite seriously distressed. He even threatened to throw up his job. "For," said he, reasoning closely, "if that's the word I've got to say for Lodz, what's going to happen if we ever go through Lwow?"

"Besides," he added, "how do you suppose

I can conduct negotiations with the local gendarme when we stop to ask the way? Am I to raise my hat and murmur 'Wooch?' politely in his ear? It's not a word that *can* be said politely, and he'll very likely club me on the spot!" There was so much truth in this that we eventually wrote it down, handing the slip of paper with an appropriate gesture to all who would assist us when in doubt about our route.

In making this journey on a cold and wintry day, our chief consolation was the fact that, roads round Warsaw being in such an appalling state, we were almost certain to strike rather better conditions as we travelled farther to the south and west. Some slight improvement did eventually take place, although not until we had reached Lowicz after a harrowing run.

At Lowicz we saw what is perhaps the only really colourful sight that this part of Poland has to offer. The Poles do not possess what one could call a "national dress," but here, as at one or two of the other country towns, we saw a local costume, worn by the majority of the women, which certainly produced a quaint effect and struck a very bright and cheerful note. Being a mere man, I shall make no attempt to describe the material or details of this dress, save that it seemed to be mainly composed of wide strips of some gay and variously coloured stuff.

To say that the road improved beyond Lowicz may perhaps be misleading to any other motorists who may follow in our wake. It would be more correct to state merely that the size and depth of the pot-holes was sensibly decreased, and that there were long stretches of sufficient smoothness to justify continuous running at a modest speed in " top."

An amusing feature of an otherwise uninteresting landscape was provided by the storks, sociable birds which seem to prefer to build their nests either on a house-top or somewhere near at hand. In many cases they will perch these straggling and untidy nests on top of the solitary chimney of a cottage. What happens when the owner wishes to light a fire I was never able to discover, for the stork is held in great respect and could hardly be forcibly expelled.

The severest trial of the day was reserved for poor Miranda when, after an arduous and lengthy trip, she was being piloted through the streets of Lodz (or " Wooch ") as the daylight was beginning to fail. Unable to find our hotel, we had been reduced to hiring a taxi, putting Henry into it, and telling the driver to lead the way to an address which we had fortunately obtained. The language problem, however, prevented us from warning our guide against going too fast and leaving us behind.

Left to his own discretion, he naturally drove, as all foreign taxi drivers will, with his foot

hard down on the accelerator and his hand hard down on the electric horn. Knowing the route by heart, he swung his crazy vehicle in and out among the holes and ruts that compose the neglected side streets, exhibiting a degree of skill in avoiding the worst obstructions that I, as a stranger, could never hope to match. In the bad light I could do no more than set my teeth and charge ahead with Miranda jumping and bucking like a horse beneath me.

How it was that that car did not break in two is more than I shall ever understand! Certain outlying sections contrived to come adrift, but the important units, wheels and springs, fortunately remained intact. I was thankful indeed when I found myself, safe but panting, at the door of the hotel.

At dinner that night our waiter revealed himself as a man of considerable attainments. He spoke several languages, including English, although his choice of words was not always so felicitous as he himself supposed. One of his observations, I am ashamed to say, was so quaint as to cause us to forget our manners and to laugh outright.

Seeing " lobster " on the menu, and having asked for some in vain, I inquired how it was that this dish could not be served. " Ah, sare," he replied, " you must understand that here we are far from the sea. The lobster—we cannot hold him." The picture conjured up by this

delightful observation was altogether too much for our gravity, although one must admit that the two English verbs, "to hold" and "to keep" are very easy to confuse.

It was with Germany as our objective that we took the road next day, our line being Kalisz, Wartenberg, and Breslau. Road surfaces continued to be bad, yet showed a slight improvement as we neared that part of Poland that had once been German soil. Of other motorists we saw not more than one or two, and the rarity of cars was amply proved by the excitement caused in villages when we stopped either to take petrol or to ask the way. On one occasion I counted no less than thirty people, all of whom crowded round us in the market square during a three-minute halt before a petrol pump.

One final effort the roads of Poland made to complete their task of utterly destroying our springs. This was not far from the frontier, and at a point where I imagine that a battle had once been fought. Whatever the cause, the surface suddenly became so bad that for a quarter of a mile we were forced to travel at a pace that would have bored the average snail. I changed down to "third," to "second," and eventually to "first," but even so Miranda gave a spirited imitation of a ship at sea!

I cannot say that it was with any very real regret that we crossed the border line that afternoon. The country we were leaving was one

that, to be appreciated, must be seen under favourable conditions only, and the weather had been far from favourable to us. Moreover, I think that we were all too sensitive to the rather gloomy atmosphere in which we had spent the previous week. One sometimes hears of this atmosphere of gloom in connection with the conventional type of Russian literature. In Poland, and especially in the Russian parts, one can detect it almost in the air one breathes.

Our first intimation that we had reached the happier land of Germany came in a very simple, and yet, in a way, quite a dramatic form. I saw some children playing in the road ahead, sounded my horn, and sent them scampering to the side. Fearing that one might lose his head and dart across, my eyes were on them as we passed. The children smiled. . . .

CHAPTER IV

CZECHO-SLOVAKIA

IMPRESSIONS OF A COUNTRY THAT IS BARELY TEN YEARS OLD

Our second visit to Germany was but the prelude to a south-westerly run in the direction of Prague. Between Poland and Czecho-Slovakia runs a narrowing wedge of German soil, the centre of which is Breslau, the town at which we stayed on the night following our departure from Lodz. This is a pleasant, if unpretentious, place, and its atmosphere is friendly and congenial to the Anglo-Saxon mind.

I remember being particularly impressed in Breslau by the kindness shown to me by complete strangers when they learnt that I was a foreigner and unacquainted with their town. This, as I have mentioned in a previous chapter, is essentially a German virtue, and one which I did not experience in other lands to quite the same extent. The German seems to make it an article of faith to be helpful to the stranger that is within his gates.

One further instance of this admirable feeling

should suffice. It so happened that I was unable to locate the garage at which I had been advised to leave the car. I therefore stopped and made inquiries from the first pedestrian who came along. He started to explain the way, but, seeing that I could not easily follow what he was saying, ended by getting on the running board and directing me in person to the required street.

Not satisfied with this, he accompanied me into the garage office, explained to the attendant what I wanted, and did his best to amplify my halting German when I gave some additional instructions with regard to Miranda's toilet and other needs. The garage man was no less friendly, and we spent some minutes in discussing the comparative merits of the British and German types of car.

Finally, fearing, and not without reason, that I might get lost again, my self-appointed guide walked back with me through the rather confusing side streets, only leaving me when he was able to point out the actual block of buildings in which my hotel was to be found. In the meantime he had contrived to tell me something of the road conditions in the neighbourhood, displaying a lively interest in our journey to the Balkan States. His English was limited to about a dozen words and my German studies were hardly more advanced, so that I have always regarded this in the light of a

conversational triumph both on his part and on mine.

Leaving Breslau on the following day, we were held up for some few minutes on the outskirts of the town. The cause of this delay was simple, and only the judicious manipulation of a spanner was needed to set things right. Meanwhile, however, the inevitable small boy, with that youthful curiosity that is international, had arrived by scooter on the scene of operations. His interest aroused, he lost no time in breathing peppermint down Henry's neck while the latter was busying himself beneath the floor-boards of the car.

Now, Henry is a trifle sensitive on certain points. An audience is ever distasteful to him when he is engaged upon some menial task in which mud and motor oil play an all too prominent part. An audience that breathes heavily is even worse, but when that audience comes hot-foot from its bag of peppermints it rouses all that is worst and most vindictive in his nature.

Lesser men thus moved, might have reached for their dictionaries, there to search out scathing words of admonition and reproach. Henry is made of more dynamic stuff. Silently he rose to his full majestic six-foot-one, annexed the scooter where it stood beside the kerb, perched himself delicately thereon, and scooted madly down the road. Long ere the small boy

had retrieved his means of transport and assured himself that it had not suffered from its late unwonted load, our work was done and we had set out triumphant on our way.

The roads towards the frontier proved good, and we were able to maintain a better average than had been possible for some time past. It was just beyond Schwednitz also that we were cheered by a sight which, to our unaccustomed gaze, seemed even more inspiring than it really was. Just as the shipwrecked mariner in the story is wont to cry " A sail ! a sail ! " so did we, after a fortnight's travel over endless plains, cry out " A hill ! a hill ! " when the first gentle rises of the Riesen Gebirge appeared in view. They were the first that we had seen since Oxfordshire !

Those who live in a country such as England, which is hilly throughout and even mountainous in parts, can hardly realise how great a part a hill can play in adding to the attractions of a landscape that might otherwise be commonplace enough. In Holland the universal flatness had appeared unusual and quaint, in northern Germany it had already begun to seem a little wearisome, while in Poland we had been literally starved for the sight of a rise in the ground !

To the motorist, and especially the long-distance motorist, a hill is a blessed thing indeed. It is something to be surmounted, something to beckon him on; it suggests all sorts of

possibilities, for who knows what is lying in the vale beyond? A gas-works or a factory, the cynics may reply, yet nothing will turn the traveller from his path until he has conquered it and seen the prospect for himself. Maybe there is another ridge ahead, and so, with an expectancy that never fails, mile after mile is thrust behind without a thought of boredom or fatigue.

Closer inspection proved that these were not German, but mainly Czecho-Slovakian hills. At the foot of them we found the usual frontier posts, and were soon ushered into an incredibly stuffy little room in which the Czech officials sat. Although the sun was shining merrily outside, they had barricaded every window against the menace of a draught of air. Then, fortified by the knowledge of being hermetically sealed, they had lit a roaring fire in the grate. The result was an atmosphere so stifling that, in the interests of health, I refused to let my wife remain in it. I really doubt whether I could have stood it long myself.

As it was, I could do little more than stand and pant while the officials entered totally erroneous facts about me in their book. I forbore to waste their valuable time by pointing out that "Foreign Office, London" was the birthplace of my passport rather than of myself, for such was one of the little slips they made. At last, with *triptyque* signed and passport stamped, the latter, appropriately enough, upon the page

reserved for Poland, I was able to escape into the outer air. A soldier then came up, decorated our car with seals and bits of string, and signified that all was now in order and that we might proceed.

Greatly as I respect officialdom in any form, I must confess that there always seemed to me to be something rather futile in formalities such as those which I have just described. The proceedings might last for twenty minutes or for two hours or more, but the result would be invariably the same. A totally fallacious description of our party would be preserved in the annals of the frontier post concerned.

My name, which, when it is set out in full, is a long one, was in itself enough to stultify the efforts of the foreign scribes. They would select one or two of the easier-looking words, but never the same two that had done duty in the state from which I came. "Carl Cardigan" was the nearest approach to a correct solution ever made, and "Mr. Morris Oxford," taken from the *triptyque*, was perhaps the furthest from the mark.

One assumes, however, that some good purpose, even if obscure, was served, and it would have been churlish as well as profitless to grudge the time involved. In the majority of cases, in fact in about nine cases out of ten, the official attitude was friendly and the official small-talk pleasant and urbane. Speed and efficiency were somewhat

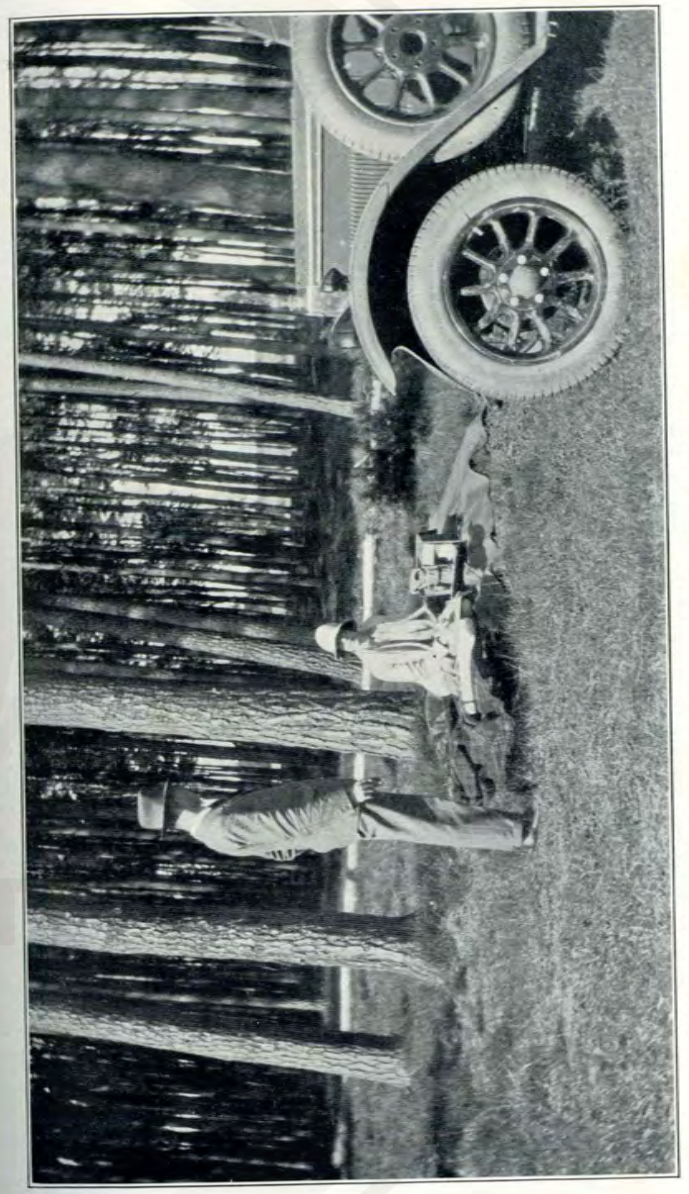
rare, but this is attributable to the paucity of cars, and to the superior attractions, road conditions being what they are, of trains.

* * * * *

Czecho-Slovakia, into which we had now penetrated, being among the newest recruits to the self-governing European nations, it was with unusual interest that we looked about us as we journeyed on. For Poland, another post-war state, the same distinction may perhaps be claimed, yet Poland has always had its name upon the map, if only as a geographical expression. Czecho-Slovakia's history is but ten years old, unless, that is, we are to take into account the old Kingdom of Bohemia over which the Good King Wenceslas once ruled.

For all her youthfulness, Czecho-Slovakia seems to be prosperous and well content. Her people go cheerfully about their work; her scenery is pleasant everywhere and reaches magnificence in certain parts, while her beer, to say nothing of her more utilitarian commodities, reaches a pitch of excellence that is unsurpassed. Even her roads are not too bad, although inferior to those of Germany.

After an hour's run among the hills, leaving the larger mountains on our right, we looked about for a secluded spot for lunch, choosing a little valley filled with pines. Here we set out our modest meal, consisting of eggs and



Lady Cardigan prepares a picnic meal in the pine forests of Northern Germany.

sandwiches—the curious continental sort—and beer. It was while we were engaged in this seemingly harmless occupation that a gruff voice spoke suddenly at my elbow, and I turned to perceive that Officialdom was once again in our midst.

He upon whose shoulders the cares of office rested proved to be an imposing figure, fully equipped with revolver, sword, and fierce moustache. It seemed to us, however, that he took his duties and his moustache too seriously. He should have seen that we were not of the stuff that gun-runners are made of, but he insisted nevertheless upon examining our papers with a thoroughness that was worthy of a better cause. With these he found no fault, but he was not yet completely satisfied as to the purity of our intentions, for he retired to a little distance, concealed himself inadequately behind an all too slender pine tree, and continued to cast the eye of doubt over our preparations for our midday meal.

I need hardly say that Henry was by this time on the alert for any opportunity of pulling the official leg, a fact that caused me some anxiety. I can enjoy a joke as well as anyone, but even the heartiest laugh is a doubtful compensation for the prospect of languishing in gaol, charged with conduct prejudicial to the dignity of the police.

It was just as we were lighting our

post-prandial cigarettes that my worst fears were realised. One sandwich, an unpalatable one, remained untouched, and Henry, who had been regarding it thoughtfully for some time past, rose to dispose of it among the trees. To do this he found it necessary to assume a furtive and secretive mien, shielding his unusual burden from the light of day.

No one, I suppose, has ever before lent such a sinister and evil air to the transportation of an article of food. At the foot of a convenient pine he gently scraped away the soil, buried the sandwich, and raised a little cairn of stones to mark the spot where this seeming villainy had been performed. A tree in the middle distance quivered warningly. Was it some sudden breeze that made the branches sway, or was it the outraged feelings of one who crouched behind ?

I deemed it wiser not to investigate this point. Something seemed to tell me that I should be doing well to bundle the whole party, including the totally unrepentant Henry, into the car and withdraw in good order from the scene. It grieved me somewhat, all the same, to know that I was denying myself the privilege of seeing that sandwich being officially exhumed.

The towns of Jaromer and Koniggratz were the next two landmarks on our route. The latter, however, although marked on the map as a comparatively important place, was by no means easy to identify. It has apparently

been re-christened since the war, and is now known to the inhabitants under another and more patriotic name. Thus it was that, on the very outskirts of the erstwhile Koniggratz, we were blandly informed by those from whom we asked the way that no such place existed in the neighbourhood. Another blow for the map-reading department's peace of mind !

Our wanderings here took up some time that we could ill afford to lose. Eventually we struck the main road to the capital, but found it only moderately good. High speeds could only be maintained at the risk of doing damage to the car, and with the certainty of causing great discomfort to the passengers.

The fall of darkness found us still some way from Prague. As is invariably the case, the last few miles seemed as though they were never going to end. Vainly we scanned the black rim of the horizon, searching for some sign that would indicate the presence of a city, and thinking of the dinner we would eat if we arrived before the restaurants were closed. As it was Sunday night, and the time past ten o'clock, the prospect, though alluring, seemed remote.

I shall never forget the manner in which we finally perceived our goal. We had been plodding up a gradual ascent without a single human being in sight. Then suddenly we reached the top and there, spread out below us like a carpet, were a myriad twinkling lights that spoke of

music, meat, and drink, and all the pleasant things with which to end a tiring day. Well may the people call this city " Praha " in their native tongue. It has a cheerful sound ; better by far than stolid " Prag " or careless " Prague," the German and the French equivalents.

Praha was quick to prove to us that its more jovial nomenclature is deserved. Late as the hour was, we were able at once to fortify ourselves with an excellent and well-cooked meal, after which came dancing and a first-rate cabaret, so that it was not until the small hours of the Monday morning that we got to bed. Even then we were lulled to sleep by the strains of distant music floating up from some adjacent all-night dancing place.

Our hotel, the " Julis," was one of the most comfortable of any at which we had so far stayed, and, feeling that we deserved a rest, we decided to remain there for a day or two. We had, in fact, passed through three different countries in the three preceding days, and even the comparatively simple task of thinking alternately in zlotys, marks, and kronen had begun to seem a wearisome affair.

We could have chosen no more delightful city in which to take our ease. The Moldau runs through it, spanned by several bridges and notably by the Carl bridge, the latter a noble structure dating from mediæval times. On one side of the river is the old town, packed with

historical interest and architectural beauty. On the other is the modern quarter, not aggressively modern, but well supplied with up-to-date hotels and restaurants and shops.

In the old town alone several days could well be spent. It stands upon a hill, and still retains its air of a capital of feudal times. Of its history I have forgotten much, all except one tale, in fact, which concerns the fate which overtook the nobles of the ancient Kingdom of Bohemia. These nobles, it appears, had led their country into a disastrous war with Austria, and their incompetence has been responsible for its defeat.

Naturally, the Austrians had no love for the instigators of an expensive war. Similarly, the Czechs had nothing but hatred for the men who had caused their overthrow. By common consent, therefore, the entire aristocracy was put to death. Verily, there was no sympathy for failure in those rugged days !

The masculine eye will number among the delights of the modern quarter the fact that the Czecho-Slovakian ladies attain to a standard of beauty that is hardly to be equalled in any other city in the world. By this I do not mean that there are a few individual goddesses in the Venus class ; rather that the proportion of potential beauty-contest winners per head of the female population is higher among the Czechs than among any other race upon the continent. I amused myself one day by walking down one

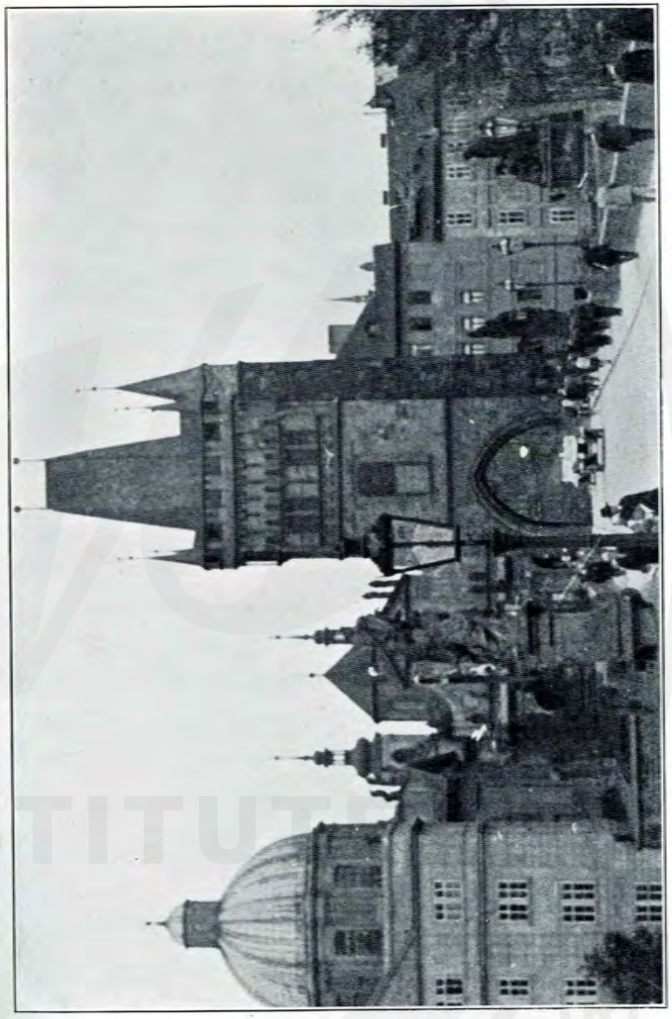
of the important streets and counting the really *ugly* women that I saw. The number was quite astonishingly small.

* * * * *

We left Prague, or Praha, for the Austrian frontier with regret, our departure being perpetuated in the public annals by the filming of that affecting scene. I cannot say, however, that I altogether enjoyed my first appearance before the " movie " camera. No one, I imagine, feels or looks his best when bidding farewell to a large contingent of acquaintances and friends; and, with the whirring of the instrument that cannot lie recording every gesture faithfully, self-consciousness comes flooding over one in waves.

Moreover, film directors are notoriously meticulous. I think we made three or four attempts to leave the town before the presiding deity was satisfied. Each time we shook hands genially all round, sprang nimbly into our waiting car, raised our hats with a fair imitation of the continental flourish, and sped away in a cloud of dust. It seemed to us that Hollywood itself could hardly have done more.

But no. There must have been something in our performance calculated to distress the artistic eye. " Stop ! " the director would shout. " No good ! Come back ! " Obediently we would let the cloud of dust die down and came back very



On the Carl Bridge over the River Moldu at Prague.

humbly in reverse. Then we would try again, either faster or slower or with more or less dust, until at last we had contrived to get the right effect.

Of course, by the time we had made the third or fourth attempt at achieving an artistic success with our farewells, all semblance of reality had been driven from our harassed minds. The genial smile had become a stiff and horrid smirk, the careless wave of the hand a theatrical and affected gesture, and the cheery salutations of our friends no more than a hollow mockery. When, long afterwards, I saw some sections of the completed film, I found it unflattering, but marvelled that it was not worse!

Having finally torn ourselves away from the persecution of the camera, and having been permitted to conceal ourselves permanently behind the cloud of dust, we took the road that leads through Iglau and Znaim to the border. Like all the Czecho-Slovakian main roads of our experience, its surface was tolerable without being really good. 40 m.p.h. meant discomfort, but 20 or 30 m.p.h. could be kept up easily enough.

Our negotiations with the officials on the Austrian frontier were commendably brief and to the point. The Czech officer on duty proved intelligent, and did not get nearly so confused over our passports, *triptyque*, and other documents as his colleagues on the German border. His

Austrian *vis-à-vis* was something of a super-man, and really seemed to have a working knowledge of his job. The latter merely gave us pen and ink, let us fill up the papers for ourselves, glanced through them once, and reached for his official stamp. In a very short time therefore we were entering the sadly diminished territories of what had been the ruling state of the great Central European empire of pre-war days.

CHAPTER V

AUSTRIA

RUNNING SOUTH TO VIENNA AND BEYOND

ALTHOUGH the western part of Austria is mountainous, the district north of Vienna is mainly flat. Gentle slopes prevent the scenery from being monotonous, but these do not rise to any imposing height. A ribbon of road, lined with flowering fruit trees, is stretched across them, running dead straight as far as the eye can see.

These trees, while they delighted our eyes, also provoked our curiosity. Was their fruit for the benefit of passing motorists, or did a government official patrol them at the proper season of the year? It was not until some time later that we learned the true solution to this mystery. It seems that the government sells the fruit about a month before it is fit to eat. The purchaser has the onus of seeing that it is not stolen before it is ripe enough for him to pick it, and presumably spends many sleepless nights keeping unwelcome neighbours at a respectful distance from his property!

Our road through Stockerau we found to be in excellent repair, and thus, travelling at a steady 40 m.p.h., we were able to keep up a very satisfactory average. It was a gravel road, of course, untarred, and a great cloud of billowing dust went up to mark our progress, a circumstance which troubled us little at the time. We had learned by experience, however, to anticipate the discovery of a miniature Sahara when our suitcases were next unpacked!

Between Korneuburg and Vienna we struck a patch of *pavé* which slowed us down to a more modest pace, but this gave way before long to a fine stretch of modern roadway leading directly to the capital. It was already dark when we crossed the Danube, but we were impressed nevertheless by the breadth of that noble river. Even at a point something like 1,000 miles from its mouth, it makes the Thames seem by comparison a puny and unimportant stream.

What is more, we were to discover later that its title, the Blue Danube, is well deserved. It *is* blue when the sun shines on it. The reason for this colouring I do not know, but it seems a feasible explanation that the depth of the river bed enables the water to reflect the blueness of the sky. Many varieties of fish are caught in it, and some of these make excellent eating, served either hot or cold.

Vienna is a fine city, in some respects reminis-

cent of Berlin. It has the same wide streets in the fashionable quarter, lined with shady trees. Its public buildings are magnificent, and it is well worth while to go and stand in the gardens in front of the new palace—a point of vantage from which Vienna's architectural glories may be seen rising above the pink blooms of the chestnut trees.

The old palace, alas, is but the shell of its former self. Much of its regal atmosphere departed when flats were constructed in it and the new tenants, mostly impoverished actors and actresses, moved in. Its walls still bear the honourable scars of battle, for this was the Imperial residence when the Turks besieged the city in the seventeenth century. Few people realise that the Ottoman Empire ever stretched its tentacles so far to the north, but it was necessary for John Sobieski, King of Poland, to march to the relief of Vienna with a mixed army of Poles and Germans in 1683.

We spent our first evening at one of the big hotels, and, being somewhat tired, amused ourselves by watching the dancing of our fellow guests. Continental couples as a general rule dance well, but the band plays in much faster time than is common in England, the result being that the traveller finds it difficult at first to speed up his gyrations to the required pace.

Henry and I retired later for a " nightcap "

in the "Bristol" bar. Here we fell in with a most amusing company. The leading figure was an old Scotsman with an accent quite unimpaired by his wanderings in foreign parts. He had been to the opera house, where he had occupied the Imperial box, and had been moved to a profound depth of sentimentality by the music and by subsequent potations of his national beverage.

He greeted me instantly, addressed me as "laddie," and hastened to introduce me to his friends. These included the manager, who was regarding him, I thought, with rather a suspicious eye, and a Hungarian gentleman who apparently answered to the name of Mr. Buda Pest. In addition, there was an Anglo-Indian colonel of the conventional crusty nature who held strong views on politics in general and on Mr. Lloyd George in particular. It was a thoroughly international and representative gathering.

As the evening progressed and the whisky flowed, Mr. Buda Pest also became somewhat moved. He concluded the proceedings appropriately with a toast to the memory of the late Emperor Franz Josef. At this the Scotsman, dour highlander though he was, all but broke down, and had to be led away, overcome with a not unmanly emotion, by his friend the Anglo-Indian. "Laddie," he cried as he wrung my hand warmly in parting, "when I sat in Franz

Josef's box this evening I could ha' wept. I tell ye, I could ha' wept!"

* * * * *

On the day following this encounter with our bibulous and sensitively minded fellow countrymen we were introduced to an Austrian gentleman, a keen motorist who had the distinction of being the owner of the first British light car brought into the country. He was greatly interested in our wanderings across the continent, and invited us to be his guests that night at his castle near Horn. We accepted gladly, feeling that this would make a very pleasant change from the conventionality of hotel life.

The Baron, for such he proved to be, guided us out of Vienna by a route that led over the hills which, at this point, line the southern bank of the Danube. He could hardly have chosen a more delightful district through which to make a small detour. The road twisted and turned, making innumerable hairpins and giving Miranda plenty of third-gear work. Beech woods, almost English in appearance, stretched away on either side, and a fine view across the river lay below.

Presently we dropped down, crossed the Danube, and joined a main road which took us straight to Horn. We were delayed, however, by a puncture, the first which our Dunlops had so far suffered, and also by the bending of the

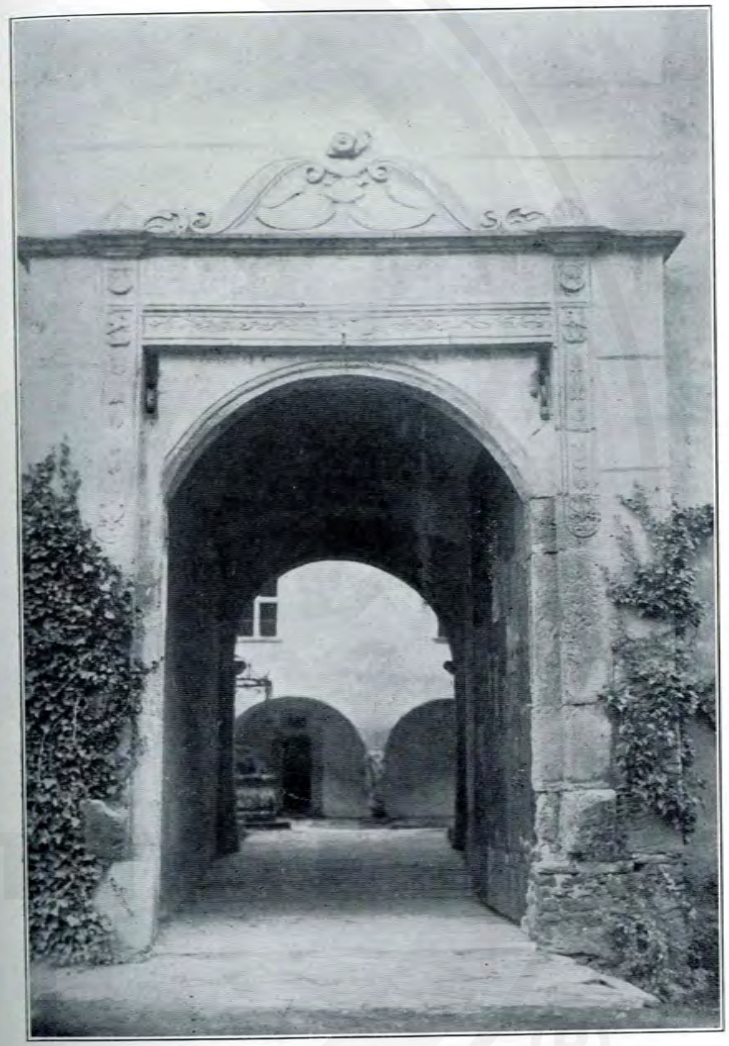
jack under the abnormally heavy weight of the laden car. It was dusk, therefore, before we turned aside through a cluster of cottages, climbed a steep and winding lane, and entered the castle gates.

The Schloss Breiteneich consists of two main buildings, one of which dates back to the twelfth century and is built in rectangular form round an open paved courtyard. Around the inner walls at the level of the first storey runs a machicolated gallery of the Italian Renaissance period. Several of the ceilings are pure Gothic, as was that of the room in which Henry slept.

Fortunately, both our host and hostess spoke excellent English, so that conversation at dinner presented no great difficulty. Only when we were discussing shooting was a dictionary required, the "capercailzie," a bird which is common both to Austria and Scotland, proving a serious stumbling block.

With the tea, which is served in place of coffee, we were introduced to a new and, as it seemed to me, a very admirable liqueur. This was known as Slivovitz, and was manufactured by the Baron himself from plums grown on his own estate. "Plum brandy" is the nearest description of it that I can give, but it was quite unlike anything that I had tasted before.

Henry and I were so intrigued by this new and agreeable beverage that we displayed what must have seemed an almost unmannerly readiness



The Entrance to the 12th Century Schloss Breiteneich.

for a second glass. Our host was delighted, however, to find us so enthusiastic over his private brew, and insisted that each of us should take away a bottle of it to cheer us on our way. The time was to come when, benighted in the Balkan mountains, we blessed him for that kindly thought!

Many months later I endeavoured to introduce Slivovitz to the English market. The Baron could sell it very cheaply, and there seemed to be a possibility of profit for everyone concerned if the public were to take a fancy to it. It was not until I found that carriage plus import duties would amount to about 10s. per litre that I realised the futility of the attempt.

Our visit had to be terminated after breakfast the next day, for we had a luncheon engagement in Vienna with some members of the British Embassy. With our suitcases bulging with unwonted bottles, we returned to our hotel and thence to the restaurant where we were entertained by several of the junior diplomats.

We dined that evening on the hills above Vienna. At the next table to us was Chaliapin, who was reputed to have been driven from the "Bristol" by over-enthusiastic seekers after autographs. He is a fine-looking man, and apparently finds it unnecessary to advertise his genius by wearing an excessive amount of hair or by any other form of eccentricity. *O si sic omnes!*

We returned after dinner to the outskirts of the city, where, in a tavern crowded with the local connoisseurs, the arrival of a new season's vintage of white wine was being celebrated. Each year this traditional gathering is held, the first fruits of the vineyards are reviewed, and all good citizens drink their fill of a liquor which, on account of its youthfulness, is far more potent than the uninitiated might suppose.

Tables are set round the walls, each separated by a wooden partition from the next. A little troop of musicians wends its way through the throng, stopping here and there to play before some favoured party. A stout man sings ditties of a humorous nature, changing his headgear from time to time in accordance with his theme, and addresses himself directly to his immediate audience. I recollect that for our benefit he donned a top hat and sang something about a cabman, his gesticulations being so clever that we were able to follow the gist of his song quite easily.

Sometimes a popular air is struck up, whereupon everybody present joins heartily in the chorus. Much of the music consists of traditional folk songs, but some of it is the work of celebrated composers such as Schubert.

Fortunately we had been forewarned of the strength of the new wine, and so did not partake of it too freely. It came to my notice, nevertheless, that the few glasses which I had con-

sumed were equivalent to about a bottle of a more matured white wine, and I think that I shall not be overstating the case if I say that we all went to bed that night viewing our last evening in Vienna in rosy retrospect.

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Our eastward run to the Hungarian border very nearly took us back into Czecho-Slovakia again. We followed the Danube, keeping just to the south of it, and came within a mile or two of the Czech town of Pozsony, alias Bratislava, alias Pressburg. Towns with triple names, headaches for Henry, we used to call them, are by no means uncommon in post-war Europe.

Fortunately we were able to avoid any wrong turning, and so escaped an embarrassing interview with the wrong set of frontier guards. It was at a point just south of where the three countries meet that we discovered the courteous and capable official whose business it is to usher strangers out of Austria and into Hungary.

CHAPTER VI

HUNGARY

FOLLOWING THE DANUBE SOUTH AND EAST

HUNGARIAN customs arrangements are rather indifferent from the point of view of the traveller by road. After running about a mile into the country we were stopped by a sentry and asked to produce our passports and other papers. This we did, only to find that the man had no power to endorse them or add the necessary official stamp. We had therefore to be escorted to a railway station situated about half a mile away.

At the station, however, our troubles were ended by the production of an official who combined efficiency, a comparatively rare quality, with a pleasant and helpful manner. He also spoke very good French, so that we were able to have quite an agreeable chat while the formalities were being carried out. Soon we were in a position to present ourselves again before the sentry—this time with a greater measure of success.

As it happened, we were not destined to travel

very far on the road to Budapest before a very unpleasant incident caused us to pull up again. A big, powerful car was standing by the roadside, and beside it a little knot of excited peasantry was grouped around some object which lay full in our path. In response to their frantic signals we naturally slowed down, to find to our horror that the obstacle was nothing less than the mangled body of a man!

Mercifully the poor fellow was unconscious, for his injuries were terrible and it seemed doubtful whether he could survive them. I was forced to drive within a foot of him, and to look down at him as I steered cautiously past, so that my memory on this point is painfully clear. Continental drivers have an unenviable reputation for recklessness, but this was the first fatality that we had seen. Unfortunately it was not to be the last.

In spite of my complete ignorance of the language, I did my best to ascertain whether there was anything that we could do. I gathered, however, that a doctor had already been summoned, and, in the absence of medical advice, we could hardly take the responsibility of moving the unfortunate man. Reluctantly, therefore, we had to leave him where he was.

We continued to follow the Danube, across which the shores of Czecho-Slovakia could be seen, until it was time for lunch. We originally selected a site for our meal on the river bank,

but were driven on to higher ground when we found how thickly inhabited was the rich grass which grew down to the water's edge. All manner of beasts and insects were clustered thereon, many of them being of a revolting aspect and of a breed not previously known to us.

My wife, whose knowledge of entomology is slight, coined the word "Bungo" to describe one of the larger and least lovable of these creatures. The term will not be found in any dictionary or book of reference, but it is vividly graphic, and for that reason I propose to retain it here. Mark well the Bungo. This is his first appearance in the annals of our wanderings, but he is destined to play a more and more important part as we penetrate farther south and east into the Balkan states.

In Hungary we were conscious for the first time of gradual but definite change in the fauna and flora of the country districts. Birds with gay plumage of a hue unknown in England flitted across our path, and even the oxen, magnificent creatures with enormous curving horns, were quite unlike the varieties which we had seen before. From time to time we passed through plantations of acacia trees—grown for their hard and valuable wood, we were informed—the fragrance of which scented the air for many yards around.

The main road through Raab or Gyor we found quite reasonably good. As in Austria, it was



The Author with "Henry" on the banks of the Danube. The old barge is aground on the Hungarian shore, Czecho-Slovakia being visible in the background.

mainly flat, but the surface, by comparison with what we had suffered in Poland and elsewhere, gave us no cause for complaint. Only one range of low hills lay between us and the capital, and these I remember clearly as the scene of our first acquaintance with the bull-frogs—creatures with which we were to become very familiar in Bulgaria and Greece.

Those who have read Aristophanes at school will recall his version of the bull-frogs' chorus, and this is actually a very accurate and faithful representation of their evening song. There is a wild and romantic note in it when heard, as we heard it, among the hills and in the afterglow of the sunset. We paused for some minutes before we were able to trace it to one of those reedy pools which the bull-frog loves.

We took some time in making our way into Budapest, as we had arrived on the wrong side of the river and could not immediately find a bridge. The Danube, roughly speaking, separates the fashionable from the business quarter of the city. The bridge which we eventually found was one which has an interesting history, having been built many years ago by an English architect.

This Englishman, so the story goes, was exceedingly proud of his work, and not unjustly, for the structure is a fine one. He boasted to a friend that it contained no flaw of any sort. If a mistake were found he would commit

suicide out of sheer disgust. Jokingly, the friend pointed out the trivial fact that the two stone lions which guard the approach at each end have no tongues in their mouths. The architect was foolish enough to take this oversight to heart, brooded over it, and committed suicide next day!

After a comfortable night at the "Astoria," we set out to explore some of the principal streets. A Hungarian gentleman accompanied us, remarkable for his girth and for what I can only describe as a "morbidity complex." The former quality he emphasised by wearing a light overcoat which was never buttoned, but which flapped and blew out like a balloon in the breeze; the latter by showing us, among the sights of Budapest, the mad-house and the grove of trees where a man had slaughtered his wife, his several children, and himself only a few days before.

We thought that we were on safer ground when at last he led us into a beautiful old church. But no; he insisted on making a circular tour of all the tombs of his departed countrymen. Opposite one vacant space he paused in thought: "Soon I shall be lying there," he muttered in a sepulchral voice. What reply, I wonder, would the authorities on etiquette have given?

We were genuinely grateful, however, for his well-meant attempts to interest us, and felt that we could only repay this kindness by asking him to dine with us. This we did, and, the menu

being unintelligible to us, invoked his aid in ordering the meal. Scanning the list of eatables with a care that was almost reverence, he responded by selecting "sucking-pig."

Conversation, while this dish was being prepared, quickly resolved itself into a monologue upon the life, habits, and early decease of baby piglets. His description of the tragic and painful manner in which these tender and immature young creatures meet their end was a masterpiece of vivid word painting. We eyed the sucking-pig with interest when it appeared, but I observed that my wife said, "No, thank you" with more vigour than politeness.

An unusually dark-coloured red wine was now poured out for us, and we inquired, perhaps foolishly, what its name might be. "Its real name is ——," we were informed, "but more often we call it 'bullock's blood.'" Our morbid friend proceeded to enlarge at some length upon the similarity between the two fluids, and Lady Cardigan set down her glass untasted.

At this point the orchestra struck up, and I made a desperate effort to change the subject. "I suppose you are fond of music?" I asked, with shattering conventionality. "Yes, indeed," he replied, "I will ask them to play my favourite tune for you to hear. It has a name which means in English, 'The Corpse is being Carried Out into the Back Yard.' It is very sad." He would have said more, I think, but

here our previous good manners, sorely tried, deserted us, and we offended him mortally by bursting into a roar of laughter that we could no longer restrain!

Subsequent expeditions through the city we made by car, and found a curious, but very strict, regulation enforced in the main thoroughfares. All vehicles were compelled to drive close to the side of the road, and within a few feet of the kerb. Knowing only too well the Londoner's careless manner of stepping off the pavement, this made me rather apprehensive, but I soon found that the Hungarians are much more considerate of the driver's nervous system. The centre of the roadway is reserved for privileged traffic only—notably for the carriage of the King.

This regard for His Majesty's convenience may seem remarkable, since Hungary is generally regarded as being a republic. The Emperor of Austria, however, is also the King of Hungary, and the present claimant to that title, the little Archduke Otto, is regarded by many as their rightful sovereign. Thus it is that the President is referred to as the Regent, and a country which my atlas includes among the "Central European Republics" still thinks of itself as a Kingdom.

The "iron crown" of Hungary still appears upon the coins and stamps, and a very curious crown it is. The cross on the top of it is invariably askew, a fact which readily distinguishes

it from that of any other royal house. It is said, although I will not vouch for the truth of this report, that its rakish appearance is due to the fact that one of the earlier kings once dropped it in the course of some light-hearted frolic!

England and the English are very popular just now in Budapest, largely owing to the sympathy displayed in certain influential quarters at home towards those who demand the revision of the treaty of Trianon, the terms of which have reduced Hungary from a large country to a very small one. Thus it was that, in the space of a single day, we saw English leading articles quoted in full in the Press, heard "Tipperary" played in strict fox-trot time in a cabaret, and saw English news reels shown at one of the leading cinemas. The latter were hopelessly out of date, and showed nothing of greater international significance than members of our Royal Family opening extensions to hospitals and accepting bouquets from the embarrassed small daughters of local mayors; yet they were received with interest and even with appreciation by the audience.

A few days can be spent very pleasantly in Budapest, for there are many restaurants and cafés built on the hills outside the city from which a wonderful view can be obtained. It is well worth while to go out and dine at one of these, for the lights of the streets and houses look quite

fairy-like when seen from a height reflected in the waters of the Danube.

The less pretentious places in the city itself should not be missed, for the gipsy orchestras will delight the ear of any lover of music. It seems curious to see these somewhat uncouth-looking men producing such exquisite harmonies, although there is a tone of romantic wildness in their playing which accords well with their roving natures. Their art is hereditary, and is handed down from father to son.

* * * * *

We had planned the next stage of our journey to take us from Budapest into Rumania—from the Central European to the Balkan states. The roads favoured us, for they continued to be reasonably good, but we were checked from time to time by the frequent tolls demanded of us on entering each new township. It appears that each district council is responsible for the upkeep of its own section of the roads, and this is the means adopted to collect the wherewithal. We passed through Czegled, Nagykoros, and Kecskemet, crossing a completely level stretch of the great Hungarian plain, and reached Szeged at about four o'clock in the afternoon.

We were still some miles from the border, and so pushed on through Mako and thence over a very indifferent by-road to Apatfalva, the village at which we hoped to find the frontier

post. We came at last upon a sentry who, in the conventional Hungarian fashion, referred us to a railway station half a mile behind us. With commendable resignation we turned back, followed the metals until they passed between two deserted platforms, and made inquiries from the solitary porter whom we finally ran to earth in the station bar.

His answers were discouraging, to say the least. Being gifted with a talent for pantomime, he contrived to make us understand that the customs officer was sleeping, *sleeping*, if you please, at his private residence. We swore that he should be awakened, and the porter swore with equal vigour that it would be madness to attempt to rouse him. Eventually, having overcome all opposition by means of the persuasive Pengo, value ninepence, we induced him to lead us through the muddy and dismal streets to the scene of the official slumbers.

We were rewarded in due course by the appearance of our quarry, who came out yawning, rubbing his eyes, and buttoning up his tunic. Nothing would induce him, however, to let us through. It might be only five o'clock by Hungarian time, he admitted, but by Rumanian time it was six, and that was much too late. It was no good letting us out of his country, since the Rumanian authorities would infallibly refuse to let us into theirs.

This was a sad blow indeed. We had no option

but to turn back, and endeavoured to console ourselves by composing a rude letter to the fool in Budapest who had told us that the frontier could be crossed at any hour of the day. Szeged appeared to be the nearest civilised town, and we therefore decided to spend the night there and to renew our efforts in the morning until sheer importunity carried us through.

Considering our disgruntled frame of mind, we contrived to make ourselves moderately comfortable at our hotel in Szeged. It was not so easy, however, to leave the town next morning, for financial difficulties arose when the time came for us to pay our bill. Having anticipated a direct run from Budapest to Temesvar, and having introductions to people in the latter town, we were carrying only sufficient Pengos to get us to the border, and only sufficient Leis to get us from the border to our destination. For the rest, we had but a Letter of Credit and some Travellers' Cheques.

To make matters worse, every single bank in Szeged turned up its nose at these securities. Mr. Thomas Cook, they said in effect, might be good enough for Budapest, but he cut no ice with them. We should have been in a very awkward position indeed if we had not eventually been befriended by an English-speaking fellow guest at the hotel.

We learned a lesson from this. At the next opportunity we provided ourselves with a few

English pound notes and a number of American dollar bills. These forms of currency are understood nearly everywhere abroad, their value is universally realised, and they can always be converted into the money of the country at a comparatively trifling sacrifice.

Much of the morning had been wasted in arguments with these unimaginative bankers, who seemed to us sadly lacking in that " big, broad, flexible outlook " which Mr. P. G. Wodehouse has so rightly eulogised, and it was therefore past midday before we were on the road again. Retracing our steps, we lunched at Mako, wasted a little time in order to give our official friend time for digestion, and reached Apatfalva railway station again at a little before three o'clock.

As before, the platforms were deserted and the solitary porter was in the station bar. We insisted that he should produce the customs officer at once, and were nearly speechless with fury when we were once again informed by pantomime that the Government's representative was at home and fast asleep. So menacing did Henry's attitude become that our wretched informant hurried off at once to wake him, not pausing even for the persuasive Pengo to be bestowed.

A long wait followed, but at last the rest-cure enthusiast arrived on a bicycle, yawning, rubbing his eyes, and buttoning up his tunic as naïvely

as ever. He filled up Miranda's papers and then, tired by his exertions, sent us away to the police station for the examination of our passports. The police filled up several forms about us, and sent us on to the sentry who had barred our way the previous day. The sentry examined all our papers again, but could see no good reason for causing us any more delay. Thus, after twenty-four hours of endeavour, we left Hungarian soil.

CHAPTER VII

RUMANIA

THROUGH TRANSYLVANIA, AND FROM THE NEW RUMANIAN TERRITORY TO THE OLD

If it had been difficult to get out of Hungary, to get into Rumania was by no means easy. The two countries are separated at this point by a river, on the farther bank of which a sentry, an unsoldierly but determined figure, stopped us. After an extended parley, he informed us that we must accompany him to the customs office in the village of Cenad, and it occasioned us no surprise to hear that this village was about half a mile away.

We politely offered him a place on the running board of the car, no space being available inside. This, however, he scornfully refused. His tunic might be dirty and unbuttoned, his face might be neither washed nor shaved, but, he hastened to inform us, he was a Soldier, and therefore, in Rumania, a person of some consequence. The common folk might stand on running boards, but the best seat inside the car would be just about good enough for him.

It is difficult to argue effectively with a man

with a rifle. However dirty and antiquated it may appear, there is always the possibility that, in a moment of annoyance, it may go off. We had to make the best of a bad business, therefore, and give the Army the place of honour while Henry perched himself precariously outside. We proceeded thus through streets even more muddy and dismal than those of Apatfalva, the weather, which had previously favoured us, having turned to rain.

The customs officer was not a very prepossessing individual. He was dirty, not particularly civil, and wore his beard at an even length of about a quarter of an inch. He filled up the usual interminable forms about us, but was somewhat baffled by Henry, who insisted on giving his profession as "nil." At first this unorthodox behaviour made him angry; then he tried to laugh it off.

"Ha-ha!" he said mirthlessly, "of course you English will have your little joke. I am a busy man, however, and this is no time for jesting. I must ask you at once to tell me what your profession is."

To satisfy him, Henry at last admitted to being a Student, adding that the study of human nature had long been one of his chief pursuits.

In due course our luggage had to be examined, and this was done in a manner more thorough than agreeable. Rumanian officials are given a commission on all the contraband they detect,

and this stimulates them to great fervour in the execution of their duty. Watching exceedingly grubby hands being thrust in among our belongings, we realised that something must be done, and done at once, if our small remaining stock of clean linen was to be preserved.

It was Henry, as usual, who rose to the occasion. When asked if he had anything to declare, he merely looked furtive and pretended not to understand. With a clumsy movement he attempted to thrust a corner of the rug over a brown paper parcel which lay on the floor of the car. Naturally, the Rumanian pounced on it like a terrier on a rat, and ordered him to unwrap it at once.

A picture of confusion and guilt, Henry reluctantly obeyed. Very slowly he untied the string, and peeled off layer after layer of brown paper. The officer was nearly dancing with excitement by the time the last wrapping was removed, and clearly had visions of some sinister but profitable haul.

At last, while we all held our breath, out came —a bottle of beer! Sixpence it had cost us, but, for the sake of its sentimental value, Henry pleaded piteously that it should be spared the immediate confiscation which the law prescribed.

It was a tense moment. The official features were convulsed with some strong emotion. Rage struggled with amusement, and there was no knowing which would win. At last, like a ray

of watery sunshine, a faint, reluctant smile rewarded us. We breathed again, and ere long were leaving Cenad with the remainder of our property untouched.

We pushed on over an abominable road to Temesvar. It was a depressing run, for the rain fell steadily and Miranda jolted miserably from one pot-hole to another. Even when the lights of the town did at length appear—darkness having fallen while we were still some miles away—they seemed to hover tantalisingly in the distance and to fall back as we approached. This phenomenon was due, of course, to the fact that the surrounding country is almost mathematically flat.

We made our way to what appeared to be the largest and most imposing hotel in Temesvar. The rooms offered us seemed comfortable enough, but we were eyed with astonishment when we inquired as to the whereabouts of the bath-room. No such luxury existed, we were informed, either in the hotel or anywhere else in the town.

It was then that we realised that we were indeed in the Balkans, and that we should have known better than to expect to indulge our insular tastes for cleanliness. It was only as a favour that hot water was supplied to us, and we were soon disillusioned as to the apparent comfort of the beds. Our first flea, and it was the first of an innumerable army, was caught that night.

On going downstairs for dinner we were surprised to receive a letter, out of which dropped a formal invitation card. We were still more surprised to find that our presence was requested at the Auto Club that night to meet no less a personage than H.R.H. Prince Nicholas of Rumania. My wife declared that she felt too tired to accept, but Henry and I decided that the opportunity of attending such a function should not be missed.

We did our best, therefore, to make ourselves respectable. This was no easy task, for our dinner jackets were creased from long confinement in a suitcase and filled with the dust and grit of many miles of road. We were uneasily conscious, moreover, that the occasion was one that properly demanded " tails."

Had we but known it, our fears were groundless. Arriving at the Auto Club, we were ushered into a ball-room which was barely half filled. A fair number of officers were standing about in smart but unpretentious uniforms, a few civilians strolled to and fro in the sort of costume which the provincial Englishman puts on to go to church, while the dresses of the women struck us as being positively dowdy. Half a dozen couples were dancing to a tinny band, but the eye sought in vain for any examples of feminine beauty or charm.

One figure only stood out from the rest—that of a young man wearing the neat blue uniform

of a naval officer. His face was familiar to me, since we had been contemporaries at Eton. This was Prince Nicholas, and with him was his brother-in-law, the ex-King George of Greece. "Royalty in a dingy setting," I thought as I glanced around, and I was not surprised to learn that the distinguished visitors were to spend the night in the comparative comfort of the saloon coaches of their special train.

In due course Henry and I were presented to the Prince. Conversation at first was a little stilted, but before long a congenial topic was found. Prince Nicholas is an enthusiastic motorist, and owns a number of cars, both British and American. At least one of these is capable of very high speeds, and I ventured to ask him how he contrived to find sufficiently good going for it in Rumania. He assured me that the roads held no terrors for those who were accustomed to them.

With reference to his recent visit to the United States, I suggested that he must have found driving much easier on the smooth and broad American highways. "Oh no," he replied, "on the contrary, I found it much more tiring. You see, I was always on the look-out for pot-holes that were never there!"

We chatted thus for some considerable time, standing a little apart from the other guests. The Prince, trained to spend long hours on his feet, showed no inclination to sit down, but

Henry and I were soon unpleasantly conscious of the stuffiness of the room, and of the fact that we had already had a tiring day. Henry, indeed, succumbed eventually to the strain of continual standing, and was forced to ask permission to sit down.

I was not really surprised, for standing is admittedly more exhausting than any amount of walking. Moreover, I profited indirectly by the incident, for the Prince signed to an attendant for a glass of water and suggested that we should all be seated—a very welcome move.

Prince Nicholas is extraordinarily English in manner, and might easily be mistaken for an Englishman by those who did not know him. He is also the only foreigner I have ever met who speaks without a trace of accent and can make correct use of English slang. Only a perfect linguist can perform this latter feat, and those who are not absolutely certain of themselves would be well advised not to attempt it at all.

It is an interesting, although admittedly an unprofitable, speculation to consider what might have been the course of Rumanian history had Nicholas been the eldest, instead of the second, son of his father. Personally, I believe that the country would have been the happier, for the Prince was popular at Eton, and schoolboys are notoriously critical of their fellows. He is now, of course, a member of the Regency Council

during the minority of his nephew, the present King.

Our departure from the Auto Club later in the evening happened to coincide with that of the ex-King of Greece. With several others, we stood aside while his car, an old model of a German make, was brought round to the door. The ex-King shook hands with his immediate entourage and stepped in. Everyone bowed. He raised his hat and gave a farewell smile. The chauffeur let in the clutch.

It was a pity, of course, that the latter should have omitted the usual formality of releasing the hand-brake. It was even more regrettable that there was no electric starter fitted with which to resuscitate an engine which, after one agonised forward leap, had not unnaturally stopped. It was rather a cruel anti-climax, for the bows and hat-raising had lost their spontaneous character when repeated the second time, and the farewell smile seemed more than a little glassy.

* * * * *

The immediate result of our visit to this function, and of the prolonged chat with which Prince Nicholas had favoured us, was a very marked increase in the respect shown to us by the proprietor of our hotel. It was not until later, however, that we learned from some travellers who had followed in our footsteps the real reason for his regard for us.

" Two of the English Princes " was the description which he gave of Henry and myself. Travelling incognito, we had honoured his unworthy dwelling with our presence. What my wife was supposed to be doing in our company was not stated. I fear that he must have taken her to be the cause of our incognito!

An amusing event known as an " automobile gymkhana " took place next day, with the Prince and the leading citizens competing in it. It was unlike anything that I have seen before or since, for a number of large ninepins were placed at intervals along the street, and the drivers had to avoid these by steering a devious course between them. The winner was he who knocked down fewest ninepins and made the fastest time.

Many different styles of driving were exemplified. There was the lady, for instance, who drove a little French machine at a steady 5 m.p.h., knocking down every single ninepin one by one. As a contrast, there was the disciple of Jehu who skidded wildly in a big American car, mowing down the ninepins wholesale and causing the Royal party to execute agile backward leaps.

I soon found myself regretting the modesty which had caused me to refuse an invitation to enter Miranda for this event. I should not have won it, but I feel fairly confident that I could have gained a " place." As it was, the Prince, displaying excellent judgment, won very easily

indeed, all the other competitors spoiling their chances by driving either far too wildly or not ambitiously enough.

There is little to see in Temesvar apart from these occasional festivities. A highly instructive relic, however, is the ruin of the theatre which was burned down a few years ago. A large sum of money was voted by the government for the purpose of repairing it, but no repairs have ever been carried out. It is true that several large new houses were built close by, but these are occupied exclusively by members of the Town Council and their fashionable wives. We were to learn that coincidences of this nature are not uncommon in Rumania.

It was in anticipation of an interesting run through Transylvania that we left the town after our brief stay there, and we were not disappointed. The weather was kind to us, and we had not travelled far to the east before blue hills began to make their appearance on the horizon, with larger mountains towering up behind them. These were the first spurs of the Transylvanian Alps, the southern continuation of the great Carpathian range.

We were advised to take the road through Lugos, Caransebes, and Hatszeg. It turned out to be market day at the latter town, and we had therefore an excellent opportunity of studying the peasants who had come in from the remoter villages. Wild-looking fellows they were, dark-

skinned, and with an obvious strain of gipsy blood in their veins. They seemed friendly enough as they swarmed round the car, yet I could not help wondering whether I should care to have them for neighbours after dark.

Bandits are by no means extinct in this primitive land, despite all the efforts of the government to put them down. There is said to be a collection of the pickled heads of bandit chiefs in Bucharest, but there are two important places still to be filled. At the time of our visit two regiments of soldiers were engaged in tracking down the candidate for one of these vacancies, but with a conspicuous lack of success.

The bullock is the peasants' chief means of transport, and their only apparent source of wealth. Two types are kept, of which one, peculiar to the district, is a big, black brute, surely the most hideous of all God's creatures. His head is habitually laid back, so that the broad, curving horns all but sweep his shoulders, giving him the appearance of having no forehead at all. A supercilious expression, hair which grows only in patches, and a fondness for covering himself with liquid mud complete the list of his repulsive qualities. From this description I have been told that his ancestor may be the buffalo rather than the ox.

The road, which now followed the course of a valley among the hills, proved to be comparatively good, far better, in fact, than it had

been near Temesvar. Snow-capped peaks were visible ahead of us, a magnificent spectacle in the brilliant sunlight, while straggling villages lined our route on either side. We actually had to travel some miles before we could find a deserted spot in which to consume the alfresco egg which my wife would cook for our midday meal.

It would be a mistake, however, to deduce from this that Transylvania is a densely populated district. It is true that cottages cluster together fairly thickly in the shelter of the valleys, but there are vast areas of mountain which are hardly inhabited at all. Nine-tenths of the population is concentrated in the passes, grazing cattle on the fertile slopes.

Many a time, when the valley which we were following broadened out into a little plain, we would get out our cameras in order to record, if possible, some more than ordinarily striking piece of scenery. Unfortunately, these photographic ventures were not a complete success. The negative showed only the faintest line of peaks and ridges, whereas the contrast between the dazzling white of the snow and the deep blue of the sky was, in fact, most vivid.

Nagyszeben was the town at which we intended to pass that night, and, as evening fell, we judged from our maps that we were making fair progress towards it. The signposts, however, refused to mention it, and we therefore decided, in some perplexity, to verify our position by making

inquiries from time to time. We received a shock when we found that, apparently, no one had ever heard of it!

Fearing that our pronunciation must be at fault, we consulted a second map. This informed us that Nagyszeben is also known as Hermannstadt. The German name came much more easily to our tongues, and we were soon able to glean the reassuring information that we were indeed on the right road and had only to keep straight on for a few more miles.

It was dark by this time, but we pushed on much more cheerfully, climbing over a ridge of hills in the firm belief that we should see the lights of our destination on the other side. Unfortunately, the signposts still refused to share our confidence. They were as dumb on the subject of Hermannstadt as they had been about Nagyszeben. The only town concerning which they were at all communicative was a place called Sibiu, of which we had not previously heard.

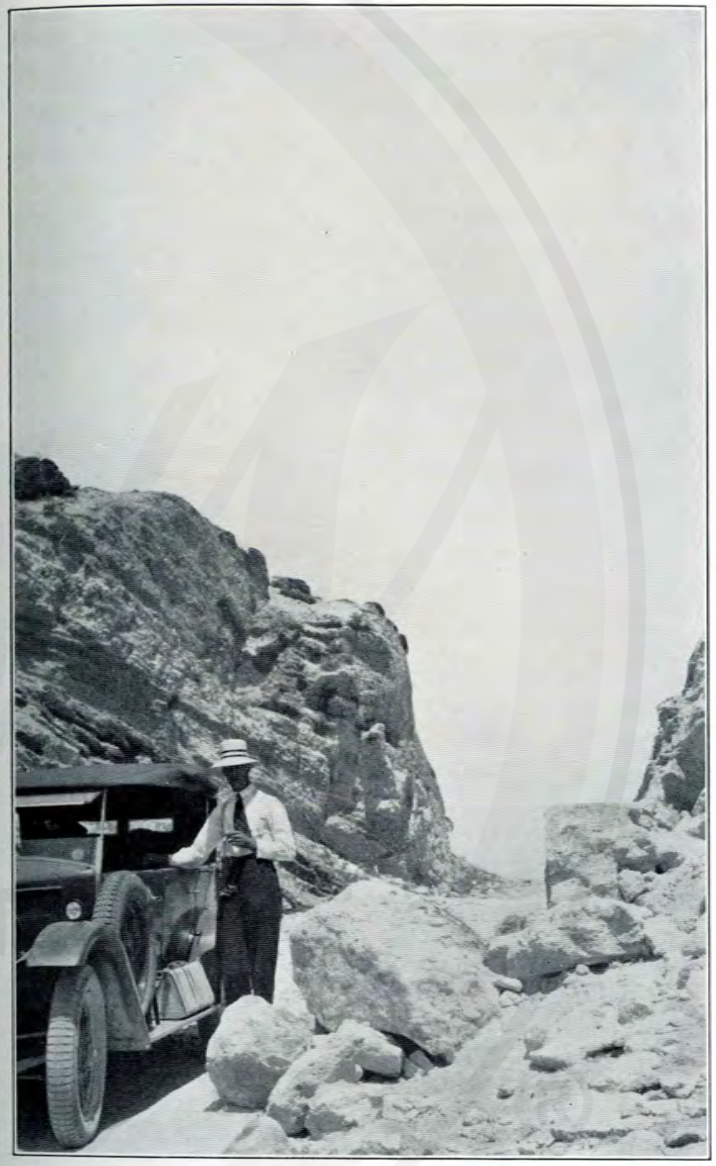
Very soon we were cursing Sibiu heartily. We were quite sure that we did not want to go there, yet milestones, signposts and passers-by would talk of nothing else. A conceited upstart of a place, we felt. It was not until we reached a fair-sized town and saw "Nagyszeben-Hermannstadt-Sibiu" written up that we realised the truth. We had arrived without knowing it!

Nagyszeben, alias Hermannstadt, alias Sibiu, is quite a pleasant little place, and the local hotel

is not devoid of comfort. We knew better than to ask for a bath, but our beds were tolerably clean, and the food gave no cause for complaint. It is not often in the Balkans that one can say as much. As for the threefold name that had deceived us, this is by no means uncommon, as I have mentioned before, in districts which have changed hands since the war. Hermannstadt is German, Nagyszeben Hungarian, and Sibiu Rumanian.

Transylvania, in particular, exhibits these complications by the score. One has only to compare two or three different maps to find "Grosswardein - Nagyvarad - Oradea Mare," "Klausenburg - Kolozsvar - Cluj," and many others. With three atlases now in my possession I can even trace "Neumarkt - Marosvasarhely-Osorhei-Targul Muresului," which must surely be a record. It is a good thing that we never tried to go there, for Henry would assuredly have thrown all our road maps out of the window in disgust!

Our departure from Hermannstadt (etc., etc.) next morning was an event that I shall not forget. The road to Bucharest climbs a gentle rise as it leaves the town, cutting off any view of what lies beyond. We reached the top quite suddenly, to see before us one of the most glorious panoramas in Europe. Smoke-blue crevasses, gleaming white peaks, and a cloudless blue sky. We stopped the car for a few minutes



A mountain pass, strewn with boulders which have fallen from above.

to take it all in. Personally, I would gladly have stopped there for an hour.

All day, however, the mountains remained with us. We lunched in an exquisite little valley not far from Kronstadt, alias Brashov, and then set out to climb up through the Pass of Sinaia, the old boundary between Hungary and Rumania. Here was plenty of third-gear work, for the road wound its way upward in spiral fashion among the pine trees with many a tricky hairpin bend. The sunlit plains and valleys stretched away below us, and great rocky crags reared their heads above.

Sinaia itself, although quite a tiny place, is quite unexpectedly civilised and up to date. Near by is one of the Royal palaces, and thus it is frequented from time to time by court and society folk from Bucharest. Hotels have been built, therefore, and there are a few shops and restaurants. Sinaia is, in fact, the Windsor of Rumania, and it was here that the late King retired just before his last illness overtook him.

On a pinnacle of rock that overhangs the pass stands a great cross of stone—an impressive sight outlined against the sky. How the materials were raised to such a height I cannot say, but the effect is of a grandeur unsurpassed by any religious monument that I have seen. Soon we were dropping down the gradual descent towards the capital, having crossed over from the new Rumania to the old.

CHAPTER VIII

RUMANIA (*continued*)

THROUGH BUCHAREST AND SOUTHWARD TO THE DANUBE

PRE-WAR Rumania was mainly a low-lying country, so that it was on to a level plain that we descended from Sinaia. Curiously enough the road, which had been tolerably smooth all through the mountain passes, deteriorated again from this point onward; in fact, I do not remember any consistently good stretches south of Transylvania. The Bulgarian roads are poor, and the Greek unspeakable.

A curious sight met our eyes as we bumped along towards Ploesti. It was getting dark, and the ground sloped gently upward on our left. At the top of this rise was what appeared to be a gigantic cemetery outlined against the sky! The place was deserted, but a forest of tall, tapering structures, unlike anything that we had seen before, stood up bleakly in the fading light. Subsequent inquiries proved that they were only the derricks of the local oil-wells, but we had forgotten at the time that we were

traversing a rich oil-producing district in process of development.

Ploesti is not a particularly interesting town, but nothing could be quite so devoid of interest as the landscape between Ploesti and the capital. The road to Bucharest runs straight and level, the only landmarks are occasional squalid hamlets, and a rigid speed limit is enforced by the pot-holes. Bullock wagons comprise nine-tenths of the traffic, plodding patiently along on the right or left side of the road as their fancy dictates. The drivers are almost invariably asleep inside, so that it is waste of time to sound one's horn. The orthodox procedure is to pass on whichever side the most space is available for this purpose.

The immediate entry into Bucharest is far more cheerful. A paved street runs between avenues of trees, and on either side are public gardens, with open-air restaurants brilliantly lit. Sounds of music and revelry are wafted to the ears of the wearied traveller, and high-powered cars whizz by with young officers at the wheel and vivacious, but somewhat over-painted, girls beside them. Curiously enough, all cars have to keep to the side of this road, horse-drawn vehicles occupying the centre.

Bucharest has one first-class hotel, and there we deposited our luggage. It is a luxurious place, but lacks real comfort. Having practically a monopoly in its own particular line of business, prices are high and civility is forthcoming only

in expectation of a substantial " tip." Strangers should avoid asking for any drinks which contain spirits, as the cost is prohibitive to anyone but a millionaire. I recollect that I once stood Henry a " gin and lemon," and was handed a bill for ten shillings (five shillings apiece) ! After that my hospitality took the form of wine or beer.

We found it as well, also, to make a point of counting our change. Henry asked a member of the staff on one occasion for about a shilling's worth of stamps, and this dignitary made three separate attempts to swindle him in the course of this single transaction ! When people are ready to go to such lengths to defraud a foreigner of twopence or threepence, it behoves one to treat them with suspicion, to add up the items of bills, and to do lightning mathematics when changing a note. That " simple faith " of which the poet speaks so highly is not a paying proposition in Bucharest.

We dined well that evening at one of the restaurants which we had already " spotted," in spite of a disappointment over the wine. Château Yquem appeared on the list at a relatively low figure, and I accordingly ordered a bottle. It tasted a bit queer, and I then discovered that it was only a Rumanian imitation of the famous French wine, and a poor imitation at that !

There was no lack of youth and beauty at the tables around us, but the beauty was far too

freely embellished for our simple tastes. Rumanian women use paint in a wholesale manner, and their natural good looks, where these exist, are therefore hidden several millimetres deep. Those who admonish the modern English girl might draw kindlier comparisons if they would look abroad thus far.

We had a long talk next day with a fellow countryman—a native of thrifty Scotland to be more precise. Scotsmen are popularly supposed to be able to hold their own in commerce in any company, but here was a man who could not succeed in making both ends meet. I was sorry to hear that he went bankrupt a few months after we saw him.

His business was selling motor cars, and he had a small stock of undeniably good cars to sell. Not being a rich man, however, he found that he could not compete with the wiles of his more powerful neighbours. He threw some interesting side-lights on the manner in which this business is conducted in Bucharest.

Nothing can be done, it seems, unless substantial " commissions," to use a genteel word, are distributed in the proper quarter. To sell a car to a private individual, it is necessary to pay anything from ten to fifteen pounds to his chauffeur. Thus the chauffeur is reimbursed for his trouble in persuading the client as to the direction in which his future motoring happiness lies. To sell a car to a government

office, it is equally important to compensate the official who undertakes to bring the merits of the vehicle to the notice of his department.

I asked if there were not any high-minded men whose natures would be revolted by such a transaction. He replied that there might be, but that he had so far failed to come across them. He drew unkind conclusions from the fact that public servants invariably appeared in larger houses and more expensive cars, and their wives in more extravagant clothes, within a very few months of taking office.

We had intended to go that afternoon to see an aerial display at the chief air port of Bucharest. As it happened, it was abominably hot, and Henry and I therefore decided to laze until the evening. My wife ventured out, however, as far as the main street, and saw one of the " crack " regiments of the huge Rumanian army (it is said to number two million men) marching through.

A really well-trained body of men is worth watching, and these appeared to march well. It would have been an admirable spectacle, in fact, but for the suspicion that the canes carried by the N.C.O.'s might have other uses than that of smartness. It was not long before this suspicion was confirmed. The combination of a slovenly man and a testy platoon sergeant revealed the manner in which discipline was so perfectly maintained.

A badly sloped rifle caught this sergeant's eye. Instantly he slashed the offender viciously across the face, incidentally knocking his cap off. In the momentary confusion thus caused another man got out of step. Reaching across, the sergeant jabbed the point of his stick with all his force into the second culprit's ribs, causing the poor wretch to stagger and almost double up. At this point my wife felt that she had seen enough of the march past, and left the remainder of the spectacle to the appreciative crowd.

We took advantage of our few days' stay in Bucharest to prepare Miranda for her coming ordeal, for we had heard much of the conditions to be met with south of the Danube. Four spare cans for petrol were accordingly fixed to the running boards, bringing our total carrying capacity up to 85 litres. Already, in Transylvania, we had once been forced to replenish our tank from a village general store, the spirit being carried out to us in an old water jug which might have been full of impurities for all we knew. Characteristically enough, also, the proprietor had handed us in change a roll of coins wrapped in paper, stated to amount to 50 2-lei pieces. Actually there were 48, so that the swindle had earned him exactly five farthings—a pitiable expedient!

A new jack was another of our purchases. The previous one, an oil-jack working on the hydraulic system, we had thrown away in a

rage a few days before. It had failed to lift the car, and had merely squirted oil over everybody within reach. One puncture which had occurred in the interval had been dealt with by means of an antiquated contraption borrowed from the driver of a passing Ford. The latter had been pretty wobbly, but we had thought ourselves lucky to have the use of it.

The Rumanian capital has quite a considerable foreign population, including a fair sprinkling of English folk. We were told by one of the latter that the word " Bucharest " is commonly used by the inhabitants as a test whereby the nationality of a stranger may be discovered. An Englishman says " Bew-charest," a German " Boo-charest," and a Frenchman " Bü-charest," using the thin French " u." Locally, the pronunciation is " Bucureshti," for a Rumanian commonly pronounces " s " as " sh." Thus the town of Ploesti becomes Ploeshti, Pitesti, Piteshti, and so on.

More serious language difficulties, however, were awaiting us south of the Danube. Bulgaria uses the Slavonic alphabet, so that the untutored stranger cannot even write down his requirements, far less ask for them. One of our last acts in the city, therefore, was to copy down two Bulgarian words letter by letter. One was " Sofia," and the other was " benzine " or petrol. With these we hoped to be able to carry on. Good road maps we could not find, chiefly,

I suppose, because there are so few roads to record.

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Leaving Bucharest, we ran almost due south in the direction of Giurgiu, finding the road indifferent but not too bad. We had been told that a ferry crosses the river at midday, and therefore pushed on as fast as conditions would allow. The surrounding country was mostly flat and of little interest, and our view of it was in any case restricted by the immense clouds of dust which our progress set up.

The town of Giurgiu is quite a considerable port, for the Danube at this point is much wider than it had been when we had last seen it in Hungary. We had passed straight from Hungary to Rumania, but the Danube had, of course, made a detour meanwhile through Jugo-Slavia. Its size had impressed us before, but here, only a few hundred miles from its mouth, it is truly a noble stream; no longer the " blue " Danube, but a turgid flood unspanned by any bridge.

We were fortunate in finding a very pleasant customs officer, who, in agreeable contrast to our former acquaintance of Cenad, spoke French and seemed only too pleased to assist us in every way. I think that he must have been aware of being the exception to the general rule, for, on hearing that I was contributing articles to the English press, he expressed the hope that I would speak well of Rumania. In case these words

should ever catch his eye, let me say at once that I respect the Rumanians for their choice of an official representative in the port of Giurgiu.

We had been too optimistic, it appeared, in hoping to find a regular ferry service across the river. When a car is to be taken across, which is rarely, a special barge must be hired, also a special tug to tow the barge. Our good friend the customs officer offered to arrange this for us, but the process looked like being more expensive than we had bargained for.

Out on the quay, however, another car was standing. Something about it seemed familiar, and, sure enough, it turned out, on closer inspection, to be the product of a well-known British firm. Here was a coincidence, and a pleasing one, for we found that the occupants were also anxious to make the crossing. This meant that we could share a barge, thereby halving the expense.

While waiting to embark we got into conversation with our fellow-travellers, a young man and his sister, both of whom replied in perfect English and with scarcely a trace of accent. We were completely baffled as to what their nationality might be, but eventually we gathered that they were Bulgarians. Two other sisters had married Englishmen, hence their choice of a car and their mastery of the language.

On the voyage between Giurgiu and Ruschuk they gave us much invaluable information as to



Bullock carts in Rumania.

the best route to Sofia. Instead of going via Plevna, they advised us to spend a night at Tirnovo, and even gave us an introduction to a friend at the latter town, asking him to find us, if possible, clean lodgings at the local inn. We cemented the *entente cordiale* with a bottle of beer. That usually refreshing beverage was slightly tepid after its journey from Bucharest in the back of our car, but it was at least liquid and therefore, in a baking hot climate, not to be despised.

Landing at Ruschuk was a complicated business, for we had to descend by means of planks on to a landing stage, and thence, in the same manner, negotiate some steps up on to the jetty. It is not every day that cars enter Bulgaria from the outer world, and these primitive arrangements clearly proved to us that we had at last realised our ambition to get right off the beaten track.

CHAPTER IX

BULGARIA

THROUGH THE BALKAN MOUNTAINS TO SOFIA

THANKS to the presence of our Bulgarian friends, our dealings with the customs officer of the river port of Ruschuk were brief and to the point. Outside his office the two British cars then parted, one making for Tirnovo and Sofia and the other for Varna on the Black Sea coast. A last friendly action on the part of the Bulgarians was to instruct a small boy to come with us to the end of the town and see that we took the right road.

It was not much of a road that this stripling pointed out to us, yet, by taking advantage of certain sections that were slightly less bone-shaking than the rest, we managed to get along it moderately well. Soon we found ourselves running across a stretch of country which, but for its parched appearance, would have been somewhat reminiscent of the English Downs. It was evident that, in crossing the Danube, we had passed from one geographical region to another, from a green and fertile country into a dry and arid land.

A clump of trees on a hilltop seemed to mark a convenient spot for lunch. A number of peasants passed by as we lounged in the shade, and we were able to remark their essentially Eastern appearance. The country-bred Bulgar suggests Asia far more strongly than Europe, being clad in baggy breeches, an open shirt and a turban, and having a gaily coloured scarf wound round his waist. He is wise in his generation, however, for his national costume must be far better suited to his environment than the conventional Western garb.

The baggy breeches give their wearer rather a curious back view, for local fashion dictates that the seat of these garments should be worn more or less on a level with the knees. For the rest, the Bulgarian peasant looks what he is—a sturdy individual quite untouched by modern culture, living the life that his forefathers lived a hundred years ago. His disposition is generally friendly, although we were destined to meet with at least one exception to this rule before we had penetrated very much farther.

That same afternoon we came upon a fork in the road. The lettering on the signpost was meaningless to us, and we therefore turned for information to a dark-skinned shepherd lad who was squatting on a bank near by. As politely as possible, we endeavoured to ascertain the way to Tirnovo.

What it was about us that gave offence will

never be known. It may have been our goggles, which we had neglected to remove. It may have been the fact that we spoke in a strange and uncouth tongue. It may have been the uncanny horseless vehicle in which we were travelling. Whatever the cause, the fact remains that our well-intentioned query awoke no chord of sympathy in the Bulgarian's breast. On the contrary, he seemed to regard our arrival as a personal affront. Our reception could not have been chillier if we had been Armenians and he a Turk.

To make matters more embarrassing, it was soon evident that this single-minded Bulgar had every intention of demonstrating his annoyance in a practical form. Gripping a heavy cudgel, he advanced on us slowly, crouching slightly, his lips drawn back in a snarl that was purely animal. Never have I seen a more venomous expression or a more menacing attitude.

There are times, I firmly believe, when the old axiom that " discretion is the better part of valour " should be acted upon, and this emphatically seemed to me to be one of them. I might have tried to mollify our would-be assailant with honeyed words, I might even have tried to mollify him by the production of the small revolver which I carried, but I am not ashamed to admit that I actually chose a more expeditious, if less admirable, course. Slipping Miranda into gear, I let in the clutch with a bang

and retired, " standing not upon the order of my going."

It was a pity, of course, that I should have chosen the wrong road for this retreat. The result was that we soon found ourselves in a cul-de-sac, and were forced to turn round and come back to the cross roads once more. I had visions of finding an enraged Bulgarian standing guard over them with the family blunderbuss, but mercifully no such disquieting incident occurred.

For the next few miles we regarded casual strangers with a not unnatural apprehension, yet, on thinking the matter over, I found it hard to blame our late acquaintance for his unfriendly attitude. After all, it must be distinctly provoking to a sensitive nature to be addressed in a meaningless jargon by three masked and sinister figures, and why, in the heart of the Balkans, should one disguise one's feelings under a cloak of civilised restraint ?

To hit a man over the head with a cudgel because one happens to have taken a dislike to him may be condemned as too hasty and primitive an expedient, yet it has the merit of being honest and straightforward, and is for that reason to be respected. It is eminently simple, its underlying meaning can be immediately understood by all, and it makes one's position clear from the very start of the proceedings.

Supposedly more highly cultured people are apt to express their disfavour in a far less praise-

worthy manner. Had the same meeting occurred in Rumania, for instance, I have little doubt that a determined effort would have been made to swindle me out of sixpence or even a shilling. It is true that I can better afford to be defrauded in a small way than to have my head broken, but it is the man of action to whom I should bear the least ill-will.

We were not embittered, therefore, by our experience, but rather relieved to find ourselves in a country where the inhabitants might be classified at once as friends or foes according to the tendency which they displayed to hit one over the head. In fairness to Bulgaria, I must put it on record that, judged by this criterion, the vast majority of those whom we met with came definitely within the " friendly " category.

All that afternoon and evening we pushed on towards Tirnovo through scenery that was impressive in its wildness. The bullock carts of the peasants seemed to be the sole means of transport in the district, for we did not see a single car between Ruschuk and our destination. One solitary ramshackle Ford, which we overtook when climbing a narrow pass at the end of the day's run, was our only link with the mechanical world from which we had come.

Tirnovo, which we reached at sunset, is one of the most romantic old towns that I have ever seen. It is built like an ancient citadel, high up on the hills, and was at some far distant date

the capital of what was then Bulgaria. I imagine that it has changed but little since those early days, even though its temporal glory has long since departed from it. It still dominates the surrounding valleys, its little white houses seeming to cling precariously to the hillsides.

Over Tirnovo's cobblestones we bumped our way—a painful first-gear progress—to the address given us by our good friends of Varna. The gentleman to whom their introduction commended us had chosen to live in a street with an approximate gradient of one in five, and was unfortunately out when we arrived. Reversing the car outside his house was a memorable business, being additionally complicated by reason of certain natural phenomena for which we were quite unprepared.

There is a popular symptom of biliousness and other disorders, frequently exploited by those who advertise patent pills in the daily press, which is known as " spots before the eyes." If you are afflicted with these you are in a pretty bad way, and should fill in the coupon at once. In Tirnovo I felt quite certain that I *did* see " spots before the eyes," and I feared the worst. My only consolation was that both Henry and my wife admitted to the same complaint. It was not until someone had the sense to say " fireflies " that we realised that we had no cause to feel alarmed.

We turned back towards what appeared to be

the principal hotel, and there hired what the landlord described as his two best rooms. Having washed, and garaged Miranda in a cowshed among a mixed assortment of farmyard animals, we went out on to the veranda where dinner was being served. Our hotel, like most of the other buildings in the town, proved to be perched on a precipitous hillside, so that we seemed to be overhanging a bottomless ravine. Across this chasm scores of little glimmering lights, one above another, marked the houses which clung to the opposite slope.

Far down below us the bull-frogs were singing in unison their throaty chorus, before our eyes flittered the fire-flies, while above our heads the nightingales were bursting into song. The music of a single nightingale is beautiful, but here were a full half-dozen together. Henry could scarcely keep his attention on his food. "This," he announced, "is where I shall spend my honeymoon."

Tirnovo does indeed seem the ideal spot for such a purpose. Warm, moonlit nights; romantic surroundings; the melody of the nightingales rising above the tenor accompaniment of the bull-frogs; what more could one desire?

We were destined, however, to discover in a painful manner the truth of the old saying that nothing in this world is perfect. The same bountiful Nature whose gifts had charmed our

eyes and ears has also given to these Balkan lands a multitude of her smaller and less agreeable creatures. On warm, moonlit nights these also come forth to take their pleasure, and he must be an ardent swain who can treat them with the indifference that they deserve. No, on second thoughts, for all Tirnovo's loveliness, the future Mrs. Henry will probably spend her honeymoon elsewhere.

We were half way through our dinner when we were informed that someone wished to see us. Our visitor proved to be the gentleman whom we had previously been seeking—a retired professor, we gathered, from some local university. What subject he had taught we did not discover. Presumably it had not been Modern Languages, for his English was weak, and his French even worse than ours.

We prevailed upon him to join us in a bottle of wine, and he soon revealed himself as a most agreeable companion. What that wine was I do not know, but it seemed to combine the appearance and flavour of an ordinary white wine with the effect of something very much stronger. After dinner the professor took us for a stroll round the town, telling us something of its very interesting history. When finally we retired, to sleep as well as anybody can in a Balkan bed, he left us with the promise that he would return in the morning to see us off.

He was as good as his word, for we were still

at breakfast when he reappeared. To his inquiry as to what sort of a night we had spent, we replied that our rest had been refreshing but spasmodic. On hearing the reason, he insisted on seeing the manager and demanding an explanation on our behalf. The manager, when questioned, was apologetic. He could not understand how it was that our sleep had been interrupted in Tirnovo's foremost hotel. The sheets on Madam's bed, for instance, were they not practically new? They had been on the bed only a few days, and not more than two or three people had slept in them during that time!

We could think of no fitting answer to this original excuse, and so, having paid our modest bill and rescued Miranda from the cowshed, prepared to take leave of our learned friend. The professor, however, fumbling in his pockets with truly scholarly confusion, refused to permit us to depart before he had handed to each of us some little memento of our visit. No one was forgotten, not even the baby left behind in far off England, for he pressed upon my wife a small metal medallion on which were the images of the two saints who had brought the gifts of speech and writing to the Bulgarians of old.

We endeavoured to thank the kind old man, who, determined to do all that he could for us, now accompanied us to the end of the town and pointed out to us the direct road to Sofia. To Henry he gave a list of the towns and villages

through which we must pass, printing the names in block capitals for comparison with the sign-posts. Thus provided, we set out to cross the Balkan mountains to the capital.

* * * * *

Over the usual indifferent country roads we kept up as good an average speed as the ruts and pot-holes would permit, being well aware that the run which lay before us would prove a long one. For the most part our route followed the valleys, so that fertile slopes rose on either side. The scenery in this part of Bulgaria is uniformly attractive, although the mountain ridges are not sufficiently lofty to be impressive.

Misfortune overtook us fairly early in the day, for at Lovetch we were either misdirected or misunderstood the directions that were given us. Whatever the cause, we found ourselves wandering off our proper course, and had no notion how we were to regain it. In one of the small villages, however, we were lucky enough to find a peasant who spoke a few words of English, having apparently been taken prisoner at some time during the war.

Conversation was not easy, for his linguistic attainments were extremely limited, and our own mental faculties became somewhat fogged in the atmosphere of garlic which he exuded. Henry declares that he was near to losing consciousness before the well-meaning garlic-

eater had concluded his remarks. We were grateful, none the less, for the information thus gained, since it eventually resulted in our rejoining the main road which we should never have left.

As may well be imagined, the time wasted by this detour upset our plans very badly. Soon we were forced to hold a council of war, and to decide whether we should push on to Sofia or spend a night *en route* at Orhanie. We decided unanimously, after some discussion, to continue driving through the night if necessary rather than provide free meals for the lesser fauna of the small provincial town. I do not wish to do Orhanie an injustice, but, from my knowledge of Balkan hotel accommodation, I still believe that this decision was a wise one.

Whatever hopes we may have had of reaching Sofia at a reasonable hour were finally dispelled by the gradual deterioration of our road. Never good, it displayed a tendency to get worse and worse as we drew nearer to the capital, until, when we were about fifty miles away, it became positively Polish—I can use no more descriptive phrase. In one respect it was actually worse than anything that we had hitherto encountered, for it was intersected at right angles by deep and frequent gullies.

It seems that during the rainy season streams and torrents from the mountains rush down into the valleys, taking, of course, the path of

least resistance. Where a road lies in their path they simply cut themselves a channel through it, and it never occurs to the simple Bulgars to bridge over the miniature ravines. The result is that the unfortunate motorist is constantly forced to slow down to a snail's pace, change into first gear, and scramble across as best he can. To keep up a decent average speed under these conditions is obviously impossible, and there were times when we were probably not averaging more than five or ten miles per hour.

Dinner time came and went, but still our progress seemed maddeningly slow. The hours passed, until at last midnight found us far up in the mountains which lie to the north-east of Sofia. We were still struggling in adverse circumstances, now accelerating briskly up to 20 m.p.h. or more, now slowing down to a mere crawl in accordance with the vagaries of the surface. It was discouraging work, made harder by fatigue and hunger.

It was then that we remembered the bottles of Slivovitz which our friend the Baron had given us in Austria. One of these was immediately uncorked, and the good home-made liquor seemed to put new life and vigour into us. I have consumed many strange drinks in many queer places, but I shall never forget the opening of that particular bottle on that wild and lonely mountain side.

We did well, as it turned out, to take this opportunity of renewing our energies, for an adventure which called for steady nerves was lying in wait for us not far ahead. Bandits, as I have already mentioned, are by no means extinct in the Balkans, and a very favourite ruse of these desperadoes is to fell a tree across the road and to hold up any hapless motorist who may fall into the trap thus set. We had been warned several times that we should be running risks by remaining out after dark in sparsely inhabited districts.

Unpleasant visions flashed across our minds, therefore, when, at about one o'clock in the morning, we rounded a bend to find the road completely blocked. A heavy log had been placed across our path, a steep bank hemmed us in on the left, while an even steeper descent fell away on the right. Lack of space made it utterly impossible to turn back, and it was hardly feasible, in the inky darkness which prevailed, to retire gracefully in " reverse."

Of all my motoring experiences, this assuredly is the one which I enjoyed the least. No human being was in sight, but there were a number of bushes in the immediate neighbourhood which looked uncommonly suspicious. As a boy, I used to derive great pleasure from reading stories in which the hero extricated himself with ludicrous ease from similar positions, to the confusion of his would-be assailants, but to be

actually face to face with such a problem, and with a woman in the car to add to one's anxiety, struck me as being far too exciting to be altogether pleasant.

Some definite action, however, seemed to be essential. Leaving my wife at the wheel, I jumped out, with a small but dangerous-looking revolver in my hand. Since the surrounding darkness was quite impenetrable, and since a shot-gun is the only weapon which I can use without disgracing myself, I must confess that I felt exceedingly unhappy. I did my best, nevertheless, to adopt a determined, *nemo-me-impune-lacessit* attitude, and advanced into the glare of the headlights with a boldness that I was far from feeling. Henry, who was completely unarmed, thrust his hand into the right-hand pocket of his coat, and, giving a creditable imitation of an American film detective, joined me.

The log, thank goodness, was not so heavy as to be immovable. With a quick jerk we flung it to one side, and, casting dignity to the winds, bolted back to the car. We covered the next quarter of a mile at a better speed than we had attained for a very long time!

How it was that we were not molested I cannot say. It seems scarcely credible that any self-respecting bandit could have been intimidated by our amateurish display of bravado. Possibly those who had laid the trap had been

called away by an urgent appointment elsewhere. In any case, we made the affair an excuse for further potations of the invigorating Slivovitz, "to restore the nervous system," as Henry, presumably addressing himself to his conscience, so beautifully put it.

We were not sorry to leave the mountains and to descend, in the fullness of time, on to a level plain. The road surface remained abominably bad, however, so that dawn was just breaking when at last we entered Sofia. We were lucky to find rooms almost at once in a very comfortable hotel—the Imperial—and to be greeted by a night porter who was courtesy itself. Within a few minutes he contrived to brew three cups of steaming coffee and to procure some biscuits, which we devoured ravenously. To complete our joy, the bedrooms into which he ushered us were gloriously and scrupulously clean!

CHAPTER X

BULGARIA *(continued)*

DOWN THE STRUMA VALLEY AND INTO MACEDONIA

SOFIA, even in a heat wave, is a pleasant place. It is of no great size, nor are its public buildings particularly imposing, yet the stranger will find its atmosphere both friendly and congenial. Rising late on the morning after our arrival, we were able to see from our windows the snow-capped peaks of the mountains from which we had come rising above the neighbouring house tops. While dressing, we speculated idly on the survival of this snow under such a burning sun.

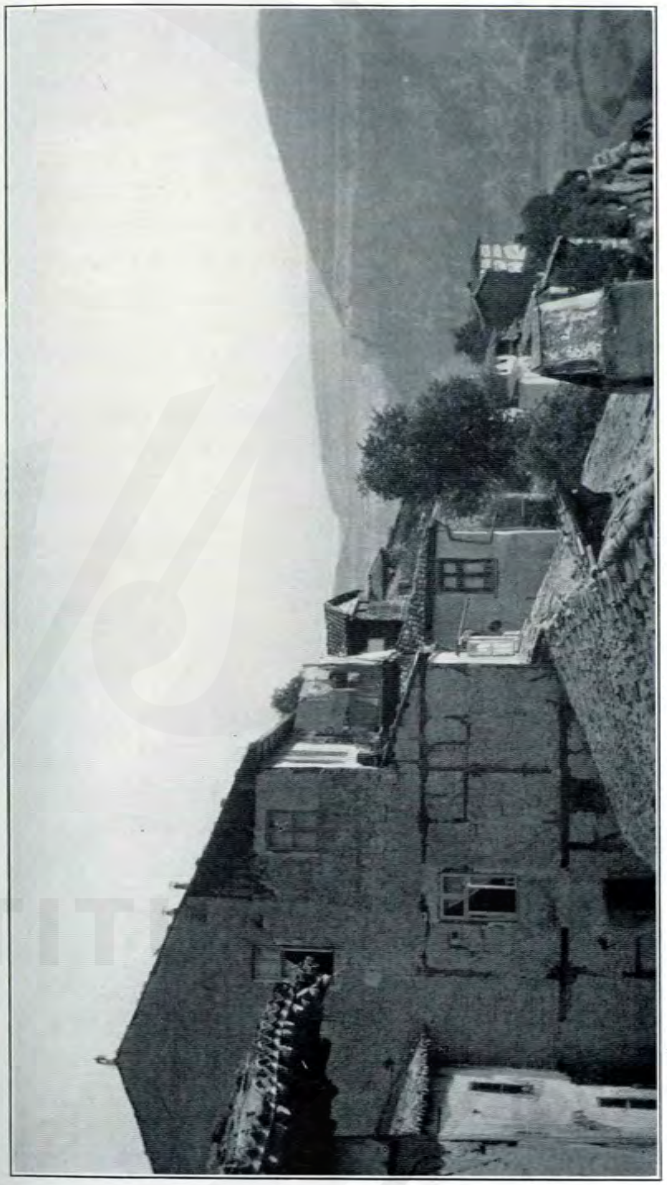
The heat was indeed terrific, as we realised as soon as we had ventured out. With the exception of one chilly week in Poland, we had enjoyed sunshine throughout practically the whole of our journey—the ordinary summer sunshine that merely causes one to take off one's coat and stop at fairly frequent intervals for refreshment. Here, however, we found the glare so oppressive and the sun's rays so intense that to leave the comparative coolness of the hotel required a definite effort of will.

Some appropriate form of headgear seemed essential to our future well-being, and we therefore made our way at once to the nearest hat shop. The hatter, fortunately, was a linguist, so that we had little difficulty in explaining our desires. It was not long before we left his establishment in all the glory of brand new panamas, complete with gaily coloured ribbons.

I leave it to others to say how this new addition to my wardrobe became me; I can only speak with certainty of the alteration effected in the outward aspect of Henry. I would not speak ill of an old friend, yet it must be admitted that the familiar features, seen dimly beneath the shade of their new covering, partook of a slightly bizarre appearance. Henry became quite aggrieved when I ventured, perhaps tactlessly, to enlarge upon this theme. I have only once seen his normally equable temper so ruffled, and that was when, during the "beret" craze, he once attempted to come motoring with me so adorned!

Lunch, the Great Healer, was at hand, however, and the mollifying effects of a cooling drink were soon apparent. We attempted, in the afternoon, to take a stroll round the city, but were prevented by sheer lack of energy from penetrating far. Reluctantly we decided to suspend our explorations until the sun was lower in the sky.

Evening came, but only to prove that the



A corner of Tirnovo, the ancient capital of Bulgaria.

midday heat had affected us more seriously than we had supposed. None of us felt particularly well, and Henry quite obviously had a temperature. Stricken in mind by our earlier unkindness, it was clear that he had fallen a victim to some local malady. We could only hope that he would recover during the course of the following day.

Next morning, however, he was worse, and we were at a loss to know what it would be best to do. This was the eve of our departure on what was to be the most strenuous run that we had yet undertaken. From Sofia to Salonika we had determined to push on without a stop, preferring the rigours of a long and exhausting journey to the doubtful hospitality of the intervening country towns. A glance at our maps was sufficient to assure us that it was no light task that we had set ourselves. We should have to start at daybreak, and we should be lucky if we reached our destination earlier than midnight.

To take a sick man with us on a trek that might last twenty-four hours, and which certainly could not last less than eighteen, would be the most obvious folly, more especially since we should have to face continuous jolting and twelve solid hours of the grilling heat. To leave him behind us, on the other hand, went very much against the grain, even though we had complete confidence in the good intentions of the hotel staff.

In our perplexity, we at last remembered that we carried an introduction to the local Dunlop agent. The latter, to our great delight, proved to be an Englishman, and immediately volunteered to see that no harm came to Henry during our absence. He further promised that, when the invalid had sufficiently recovered, he would see him safely on to the Salonika train. All this, as we learned from Henry afterwards, he faithfully performed.

It was with a clear conscience, therefore, that we were able to make preparations for our departure, which was timed to take place at the uncivilised hour of 4 a.m. Provisions, consisting mainly of eggs and beer, had to be laid in, to say nothing of those minor items that go to the making of tea. Certain rather messy mechanical preparations I decided to postpone until they could be made under cover of darkness just before the start.

My wife, very sensibly, packed early and snatched a few hours of sleep. For my part, I spent the evening at a cabaret show, buoyed myself up with a bottle of wine, and emerged at about 3 a.m. to dabble in oil and grease. Dawn was just breaking when Miranda, fully supplied with these necessities, drew up before the hotel. Loading the luggage, bidding farewell to Henry, and hiring a taxi to lead us out of the city, kept us employed until the grey light was strong enough to drive by. With

the knowledge that we should not see civilisation again until we reached the shores of the Ægean Sea, we left Sofia on the Dupnitsa road.

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For the first ten or twenty miles, the surface over which we travelled could hardly have been worse. It had obviously not been repaired for many years, and pot-holes were so prolific that it would have been waste of time to have attempted to steer round them. There was nothing for it but to bump along and to hope for better things ahead.

At seven o'clock we stopped for breakfast, choosing a sunny spot on the side of a hill. Before our meal was finished, however, we were regretting our choice, for the heat increased with unpleasant rapidity as the sun rose higher. In the valley below us we were able to observe units of the Bulgarian army completing some manœuvres which had evidently commenced at dawn. Blood-curdling yells announced that the attacking force was just driving home its final charge.

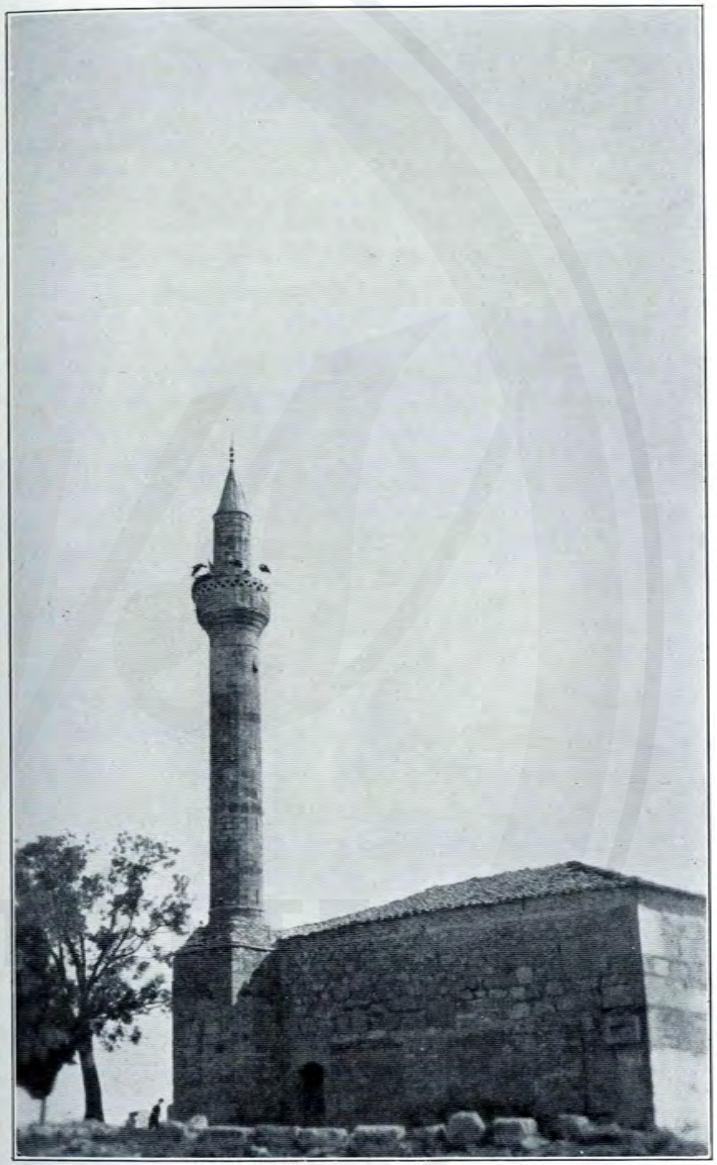
The Bulgarian is a sturdy fighter, and, what is more, fights cleanly. Such, at least, is the reputation given him by those who were engaged on the Salonika front during the Great War. I am told that, when wounded men were lying between the trenches, the Bulgarians would always permit stretcher parties to come out

into the open to bring them in. While this was being done, a brief truce was honourably observed.

The heat of the day was upon us by the time our journey was resumed. Through arid country we jolted wearily along to the market town of Dupnitsa, passing through Radomir on our way. In Dupnitsa we were the privileged spectators of a curious incident, the chief actors in which were an ox and a horse. These two animals had, for some reason or other, been harnessed together to a cart—a partnership that did not seem to be particularly agreeable to either.

We approached them quietly, seeing that they were unattended, but this did not prevent the horse from taking fright. To say that he bolted would not be accurate, since no horse can bolt with any degree of success when securely attached to such a slow-moving animal as an ox. He did his best, however, and this ill-assorted pair fox-trotted wildly down the street, the horse moving in spasmodic bounds and the ox in an ungainly and unwilling form of shuffle!

This ludicrous spectacle created no little stir, in the midst of which the driver rushed out from a café, yelling abuse at the already excited animals. He was just in time to see a wheel part company with the cart, sending a shower of garden produce flying across the road! For



A deserted minaret, once the symbol of Turkish rule in Bulgaria, now a favourite resting place for Storks.

a moment I feared that, as the innocent cause of all this trouble, we might find ourselves in an unpleasant position, but fortunately the man had the good sense to shrug his shoulders and to accept the apologies we offered.

A little further on we were forced to stop and ask the way. This, in Bulgaria, is a complicated business. On a previous occasion it had led to an attempted assault, and now we were mystified by the fact that our would-be informant persisted in shaking his head when saying "Yes" and nodding it when saying "No." Apparently this is the Bulgarian custom, but it is one that is apt to cause all manner of confusion, and we should certainly have taken the wrong road if we had not previously been warned of it.

It was in the same district that we first saw Turkish minarets, vivid reminders of the time, less than twenty years ago, when the Turks held sway within fifty miles of Sofia. At present these minarets are used chiefly by the storks, two or three of which may be seen on each, building their ungainly nests or standing on one leg chattering to each other.

Somewhere between Dupnitsa and Gorna Djoumaia we caught our first glimpse of the river Struma, the valley of which we were to follow for the rest of the day. I call it a river, yet in some important respects the Struma differs from the dictionary definition of that

term. In the summer, for instance, it is practically devoid of water, only a thin trickle and a few pools remaining as a guarantee of good faith. Judging by the distance from bank to bank, however, it must be quite an imposing stream during the winter months.

Small tributaries of the Struma, these being completely dried up, crossed our path from time to time. Sometimes we would drive over them in luxury by means of a bridge, but very often we would be forced to descend into them and to climb out the other side. It seems that many bridges were destroyed during the war period, and of these only a small proportion have been rebuilt. Considerable caution was required in negotiating these obstructions, but, where the banks were not too steep, Miranda tackled them without much ado.

On the whole, we were glad to observe that the road surface appeared to be improving as we travelled southward. Broken bridges are a nuisance, but much can be forgiven if it is possible to attain a reasonable speed in the intervals between them. Despite the fact that I had not slept, a temporary access of energy came to me in the Struma valley, so that, for some hours at any rate, we kept up quite a decent average.

The heat, however, was terrific. The dust rose in clouds about us, and the sun's rays, striking the bare and rocky slopes, were radiated

on to us with undiminished vigour. To leave the car for the purpose of taking photographs was like stepping into a furnace. Needless to say, we drove with the hood up and an open windscreen, but even so it was not long before we were parched with thirst.

The beer which we had brought was, alas, of little value. It had been cold when we left Sofia, but now it was luke-warm and hardly drinkable. We decided that it was essential to make a stop for lunch in the next patch of shade that we could find. The result was that we kept going for another hour, looking vainly for a patch of shade sufficiently large to accommodate two people. We never found one, but were forced at last to huddle together under a ledge of rock which only partially protected us.

An idea struck me while my wife was busy with the eggs and other provender. A dribble of water ran near by, and into this I thrust two of the beer bottles to cool. After about half an hour they were as nearly cold as they were ever likely to be, so that we were able to wash down our meal with something moderately refreshing. With renewed vigour we pushed on toward the frontier.

The road was winding now, following the hillsides which ran down into the valley with many sharp twists and hairpin bends. Still, with a respectable surface to aid us, we were able to keep up nearly as good a pace as before.

It was at about tea time that we crossed from the right to the left bank of the Struma, using a temporary wooden bridge in place of the stone one which lay in ruins near by. We passed through a wild district for the next ten miles, but at last the lowing of oxen and the bleating of sheep announced the presence of the frontier post that we were seeking.

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Truly it was more like a market place than a frontier post, yet we could dimly discern amid the sheep the upper portions of a Bulgarian official. What he was doing in this rustic setting I was not able to discover. Possibly he was issuing passports before allowing the flock to enter Greece. At any rate, he extricated himself on seeing us, and was soon engrossed in dealing with our papers.

Our official exit from Bulgaria presented little difficulty, but our entry into Greece was complicated by several disturbing factors. In the first place, it was necessary for us to force our way through the intervening barrage of sheep. This required not a little tact and cunning, for there was a grave and ever-present danger that we might inadvertently drive a Greek animal into Bulgaria or a Bulgarian into Greece, thereby causing an international incident.

Then again, it appeared that the Greek frontier post was the social centre of the district. Its

outbuildings included a " pub," and thither the local youth had gathered together to admire the livestock and to consume such liquid refreshment as was appropriate to the heat of the day. Since the entire staff was similarly employed, it was some time before any serious business could be undertaken.

I should explain that Greece differs from the majority of European nations in her determination to have nothing to do with those *triptyques* or *carnets* by means of which cars are normally introduced from one country into another. The resultant difficulties which beset the harmless traveller have been represented to the government on many occasions, but only with the result that the whole system is " under consideration " and seems likely to remain so. Eastern governments are proverbially dilatory, and little satisfaction is to be obtained from appealing to them.

Knowing all this, I had taken the trouble to procure a letter from the Greek Ambassador in London, beseeching the local authorities to grant me the usual facilities. Modern Greek does not differ vastly from the ancient language, and I was able to decipher this much for myself.

To my intense disgust, however, the local Greeks professed the most supreme contempt for their Ambassador. That diplomatic dignitary might, we were informed, be the Big Noise in London, but when we were in Mosquitopolis,

Macedonia, we would have to pay attention to the little man in the far-too-well-fitting Harold Lloyd costume who happened to be the officer in charge.

We were fortunate in finding one potential friend in the official interpreter who addressed us in quite fluent French, but it was small comfort that the latter could give us. His superior, it seemed, was within his legal rights, since the only man who has the power to expedite the entry of cars into Greece is the president of the Auto Club, whom we had neglected to inform of our intentions.

The nattily dressed gentleman then proceeded to lay down the law in no uncertain terms. He would allow us to proceed (we thanked him), but on one condition only. We must take with us a guide (felicitous word!) as far as the customs office at Salonika. Further, we must pay for the board and lodging of this "guide" during the time that he remained with us.

I refused point blank to pay for a custodian whom I did not require. If the man were forced upon us, I pointed out, that was the government's affair and not ours. Much wrangling ensued, and to wrangle with a Greek is not a job to be lightly undertaken! I suppose that an hour or more must have been wasted in mutual recriminations, although I fear that the little interpreter must have watered down many of my snappier flights of pure invective. For an amateur

speaking in a foreign language, I fancy that I was fairly eloquent!

The eventual result was that we departed with our "guide"—a particularly miserable specimen of Greek manhood—stowed away among the luggage in the back of the car, but without having given any undertaking as to his upkeep. I felt very much inclined, having left the frontier post behind, to hit him over the head with some blunt instrument and leave him in the first convenient ditch, but perhaps it was just as well that more moderate counsels prevailed. It was thus that, as evening was falling, we jolted down the dusty cart-track into the territories of Greece.

CHAPTER XI

GREECE

RUNNING SOUTHWARD TO SALONIKA

Our first duty to the Greek government, it appeared, was to make a stop at Demirhisar, a dingy little town near the frontier, for the purpose of obtaining an official stamp for certain documents. This, to add to our annoyance, proved an expensive process, and our small store of drachmas had dwindled to an alarming extent before we were able, still under escort, to push on towards Salonika.

Greek currency, which we were now using for the first time, demands considerable mathematical ability. This is due to a highly ingenious system whereby the Treasury, to make both ends meet, has clipped off a quarter from all notes of certain denominations, notably those of 50 and 500 drachmas. On being handed these clipped notes in change, it becomes necessary to discover, by a lightning computation, exactly what three-quarters of 50 or 500 may be—rather an awkward sum! Our financial dealings with the uniformed extortioner were therefore some-

what protracted, and it was almost dark before we left his office.

Seres is the first town of any size on the Salonika road, and there we hoped to dine. The surface over which we had to travel, however, was worse than anything that we had hitherto encountered, so that the slowness of our progress became irritating in the extreme. Much of our running was done, of necessity, in third or second gear, and to exceed 10 m.p.h. was to court the danger of a broken spring. After fifteen hours of almost continuous driving, the strain imposed by such conditions is not easy to describe.

The so-called "roads" of Macedonia, even if they were less deeply rutted and pot-holed, would be perplexing enough. Their width, for instance, may vary from six feet to sixty yards. The peasants' carts have hewed them out, and succeeding generations of carters, rather than follow in the wheel tracks of their predecessors, have made detours into the less devastated areas on either side of the original roadway. Imagine the serried rows of metals at Clapham Junction, deep ruts taking the place of railway lines, and you will have a picture of a typical Greek provincial thoroughfare!

Signposts are unknown. None exist throughout the length and breadth of Greece. We had, therefore, to rely entirely upon our own sense of direction and the very uncertain advice of our

totally inefficient "guide." Many times during the hours of bumping and jolting that followed we felt convinced that we had lost our way, but at last, at nearly eleven o'clock at night, we were rewarded by the sight of the scattered lights of Seres.

An unsavoury place it proved to be. Filthy little houses line the main street, down the centre of which runs a gutter into which all the local sewage is drained. The result is a smell that is almost unique! It is even visible to the naked eye, since vaporous horrors may clearly be observed rising up in the glare of the lamps.

When one is tired, however, one is not particular, and we therefore sought out the principal hotel, intending to spend the night there and complete our journey in the morning. As it happened, the hotel was full. I then entered one of the secondary hotels, hoping to gain some idea of the accommodation that we might expect. I certainly succeeded. My wife tells me that I staggered out again, looking slightly green, and declaring that a night on the open road would be infinitely preferable!

It was evident that there was nothing for it but to continue driving until Salonika, and civilisation, was reached. Our next endeavour was to obtain some food. Several open-air cafés were still open, and at one of these we stopped. Various dishes were set before us, but

one looked more unappetising than another. At last we decided to play for safety and to order plain boiled eggs.

Even this simple request seemed to put a strain upon the resources of Seres. First they brought us raw eggs, and we sent these away untouched. Then they brought eggs that had obviously had only a nodding acquaintance with the saucepan, and were still completely liquid. These also we rejected. At the third attempt they supplied eggs which had been boiled as hard as bricks, and these, to satisfy our growing hunger, we forced ourselves to eat.

We were equally unlucky in the matter of drinks. In a bottle of wine we had hoped to drown our sorrows, but we were supplied with a fluid that looked like red ink, but which tasted far, far worse! Eventually we quenched our thirst in a brand of beer which at least was cool and not actively unpleasant.

It was now midnight, and, although there was clearly no chance of reaching our destination before dawn, we climbed into Miranda and set out once more. By this time, not having slept the previous night, the burst of energy which had enabled us to make such good going down the Struma valley had left me. My eyes, which had been fixed continuously on a white surface lit first by the blaze of the sun and then by the glare of our head lamps, were beginning to ache most painfully.

Very soon my wife had to come to the rescue. While I closed my eyes and tried to rest them, she took the wheel. Of course, the inevitable happened almost at once. Relieved from the strain of driving, I fell asleep, and not even the agonised leaping of the car from rut to rut was sufficient to awaken me.

Of what happened during the next four or five hours I know nothing. Apparently the wretched little "guide" tucked himself down among the luggage and also slept, so that Lady Cardigan, unwilling to rouse me, had to carry on by herself. There is a range of mountains between Seres and Salonika, and over these we climbed. The road remained atrocious, zig-zagging up and up with innumerable hairpin bends. In many places boulders had fallen from above, and sections of the roadway had broken away and plunged into the abyss beneath. Strange nocturnal animals scuttled away from our approaching lights, only an occasional tortoise remaining to pay the penalty for its proverbial slowness.

It was in the grey dawn that I finally awoke, very stiff and cold and rather ashamed of my protracted slumbers. By this time we had reached the plains again, and after another weary hour of driving were able to see the sea ahead of us. Soon we were heading for what looked like a big field planted with some strange crop, white in colour, which gleamed in the first

rays of the sun. It was not until we drew nearer that we could ascertain the nature of that crop, and it was with a shock of surprise that we realised suddenly that it was the harvest of War that had attracted our attention.

The "field" turned out to be an enormous cemetery, and its white colour to be due to the serried rows of crosses, each marking the last resting place of some victim of the Salonika campaign. There must have been many thousands of them together. Salonika itself, dismal and dilapidated, lay only a few kilometres further on.

It was a curious sort of city that presently confronted us. Filthy streets with abominable surfaces; tumble-down houses, many of them in ruins; the ships and sailors of a dozen nations; here and there an oasis of cleanliness where new buildings have arisen since the war; such is Salonika to-day. Fortunately it boasts one hotel which is above reproach, and to this we made our way.

It was by now broad daylight, and we had been travelling steadily for just over twenty-four hours. To get into bed was our only thought. Leaving Miranda standing in the street, we told our escort to make himself scarce until lunch time at least, which I fancy he was glad enough to do. Ten minutes later we were between the sheets.

* * * * *

It was not until the afternoon that we were

sufficiently recovered from our exertions to attend to business. An interview with the customs authorities seemed essential, but I was lucky in first obtaining an introduction to a leading member of the local Auto Club. The latter, to my great delight, proved to be a most charming gentleman, who was greatly concerned to hear of the trouble to which we had been put.

His sympathy took a practical form, for he insisted on accompanying me to the customs office. My letter from the Greek Ambassador was re-read, being greeted this time with more respect, and our unhappy " guide " was most thoroughly abused for a piece of officiousness for which he was not really to blame. For the first time I felt rather sorry for the man, for both the Salonika officials and my new-found friend combined to upbraid him. His protestations of innocence became positively pathetic, but the general opinion of the meeting was against him.

The upshot of it all was that I gained my point, the miserable scapegoat being sent back to the frontier without being paid a single drachma for his trouble. I suppose that the government had to refund his travelling expenses, but I, at any rate, was troubled with him no more. After this ignominious exit, my dealing with Greek officialdom ran smoothly, and even cordially, enough.

We spent that evening very pleasantly at the

house of our benefactor, some distance out from the reek of Salonika (for that city does really reek when a hot day draws to its close). From a distance, however, its lights, stretching along the coast, looked quite romantic. Across the sea the moon was rising over Mount Olympus, which we could vaguely discern upon the skyline. Certainly the East, even the Near East, is beautiful at night.

We lazed away all the next day, only exerting ourselves to remove a quantity of dust and grit from Miranda's carburettor. A wire, bringing encouraging news, arrived from Henry, and the following morning, at a most uncivilised hour, the convalescent himself turned up. In the interval he had paid a visit to Jugo-Slavia, and had much to tell us of his adventures there.

Soon after our departure from Sofia he had taken a turn for the better, and, with the assistance of the Dunlop agent, had accordingly booked a passage to Salonika by train. Since no direct means of communication exists between the two cities, they entailed an excursion into Jugo-Slav territory as far as the junction of Nish.

The local railway service proved to be grossly inefficient and slow, but he was able to while away part of the journey by chatting with a member of the Frontier Commission which was at work in the neighbourhood. This gentleman was employed in rounding up stray Bulgarians,

Jugo-Slavs and Greeks, and in returning them, with their wives, families and other belongings, to their native soil.

It is interesting to note that, after some years in the Balkans, the ethnological expert had acquired the Bulgarian peculiarity which I have already referred to—that of shaking his head when saying "Yes" and nodding it when saying "No." Henry was much intrigued by this, and amused himself by practising it when he thought that he was unobserved. He assured us that it is a feat quite beyond the powers of an amateur, and that he only succeeded in arousing the very natural suspicions of his fellow-travellers!

Eventually he arrived at Nish, only to find that he had six hours to wait for his connection. Stranded in what he describes as a dismal and God-forsaken little township, he naturally looked round for some means of legitimate amusement. It turned out, however, that the entire social life of Nish centres round the hot and stuffy little station bar, and he therefore decided, rather than spend half the day carousing with the station master and his friends, to hire a private room and to write some letters.

For the sum of one-and-sixpence he was able to rent one of Nish's most luxurious apartments. It was dirty and smelly and full of flies, but it was the best available and he had to be content with it. He scribbled away industriously for

some time until, being thirsty, he was tempted to go out and purchase some fruit from a stall which he saw in the road. Henry was impressed by the fresh appearance of this fruit, which seemed to defy the ravages of the sun in a manner quite remarkable.

He was actually about to cross the street when he saw the astute fruiterer wandering off to a stream which ran near by. Stooping down, the latter filled his mouth with water, which, however, he carefully refrained from swallowing. Instead, he returned to his stall, drew in a deep breath, and expelled the liquid over his fruit in an accurate and powerful jet! It was a sadder and a wiser Henry who presently returned, fruitless, to his one-and-sixpenny room.

The Salonika train steamed in that evening, and the moderate comfort of a corner seat seemed to offer a favourable opportunity for slumber. The guard, however, was officious, and kept popping in and out with requests for tickets or passports every hour or so, rendering sleep spasmodic. He probably only wanted to be tipped, but Henry was obstinate and refused to pay for immunity from this form of persecution.

At dawn a halt was made in what looked like an ordinary siding, but which turned out to be Salonika station. It was only when he saw the other passengers descending with their luggage on to the inhospitable metals that Henry realised

that he had arrived in the metropolis of Northern Greece. A bath and a good breakfast at our hotel were needed to convince him that he was really in touch with civilisation once more.

* * * * *

That same afternoon we decided to leave for Kozani, our first stopping place on the road to Athens. This particular town had been chosen chiefly because we had an introduction to the head of a firm engaged in business there. It was reputed—quite wrongly, as we soon discovered—to be only a half-day's run to the south-west, and was on the one practicable motor route between Salonika and the capital.

Immediately after lunch, therefore, we bade farewell to our Greek friend (who privately thought us a little mad for not putting the car on board a steamer but was too polite to say so) and bumped our way out of the city. The road proved to be so incredibly bad that I hesitate to attempt a description of it. Some idea of its appalling character may, however, be judged from the fact that we encountered several pot-holes in which it was possible for me to stand upright, my extended hands resting upon the surface! It is hardly surprising that most of our running had to be done on one of the many parallel tracks.

We travelled until dusk over an arid plain, after which a series of hairpins led us up

into a range of mountains. It was soon too dark to appreciate scenery which must have been very fine, but every few miles, where great lumps of roadway had side-slipped down the mountain side, we were able to catch glimpses of the abyss that lay below us. Falls of rock also forced us occasionally to the brink, so that driving was by no means devoid of excitement.

It is a peculiarity of Greek mountain roads that they neither seek to avoid the highest ranges nor indulge in steep gradients to surmount them. They merely zigzag up and up interminably, a second-gear bend being followed by a third-gear climb, time after time, until the summit is reached. It is to Miranda's everlasting credit that she never boiled under these conditions, although she frequently got very hot after a few miles of continuous low-gear work.

It was very late, in fact it was nearly midnight, when we eventually dropped down into Kozani. It turned out that the head of the firm to which we had been commended was away, but a subordinate was waiting to receive us and to do his best to make us comfortable. Mindful of the local road surfaces, he expressed no surprise at our tardy arrival. Greeting us with many kindly words prefaced invariably by "Say, bo' "—a form of address which, delivered with a strong Greek accent, sounded distinctly quaint —he at once piloted the expedition to the

hotel at which he had reserved accommodation for us.

Our rooms could not, by any stretch of the imagination, be described as palatial. Henry's was a cubicle of about ten feet by six, while that allotted to Lady Cardigan and myself was reminiscent of a dungeon, and could only be entered through an ante-room in which a number of grimy peasants were sleeping. The window being of minute proportions, their contribution to the atmosphere could hardly fail to attract attention! We deposited our luggage, however, and, after garaging Miranda, asked to be shown some suitable restaurant for supper.

Our friend the linguist not only conducted us to an establishment "run on Amurrican lines, yes sir, sure thing," etc., etc., he also consented to join us in our belated meal. While we were eating, or rather toying with some chicken that was much too heavily spiced, he amazed us by the information that his attainments had been garnered in "God's own country." There he had learned to speak "English," and to dress in the popular style of Mr. Harold Lloyd.

We enlisted his help in the ordering of wine, for we were all very thirsty and had been looking forward to a drink. White wine was our first suggestion, but in this we were unlucky, since the fluid brought to us resembled nothing more than a pale yellow species of paraffin. We then voted for red wine, and this time did rather

better. The liquid supplied certainly did resemble red ink, but, unlike that of Seres, ink of a very superior brand. I was actually able to drink a couple of glasses of it.

My wife, however, was less adventurous. She asked for "water," much to the mystification of the waiter. It was necessary, in fact, for our companion to explain matters, which he did very satisfactorily by the simple expedient of announcing "Say, bo', its *warrer* that the lady wants." The waiter understood at once.

Ten minutes later I found myself sincerely wishing that I had followed her example. I do not know what was in the alleged "red wine," but it certainly had a lamentable effect upon my internal organs. I am told that I turned a pale shade of green, and had to be supported back to the hotel. Had my wife not instantly put me to bed, I am convinced that the worst must have happened! As it was, I dropped off to sleep with poignant memories of my first repast in central Greece.

CHAPTER XII

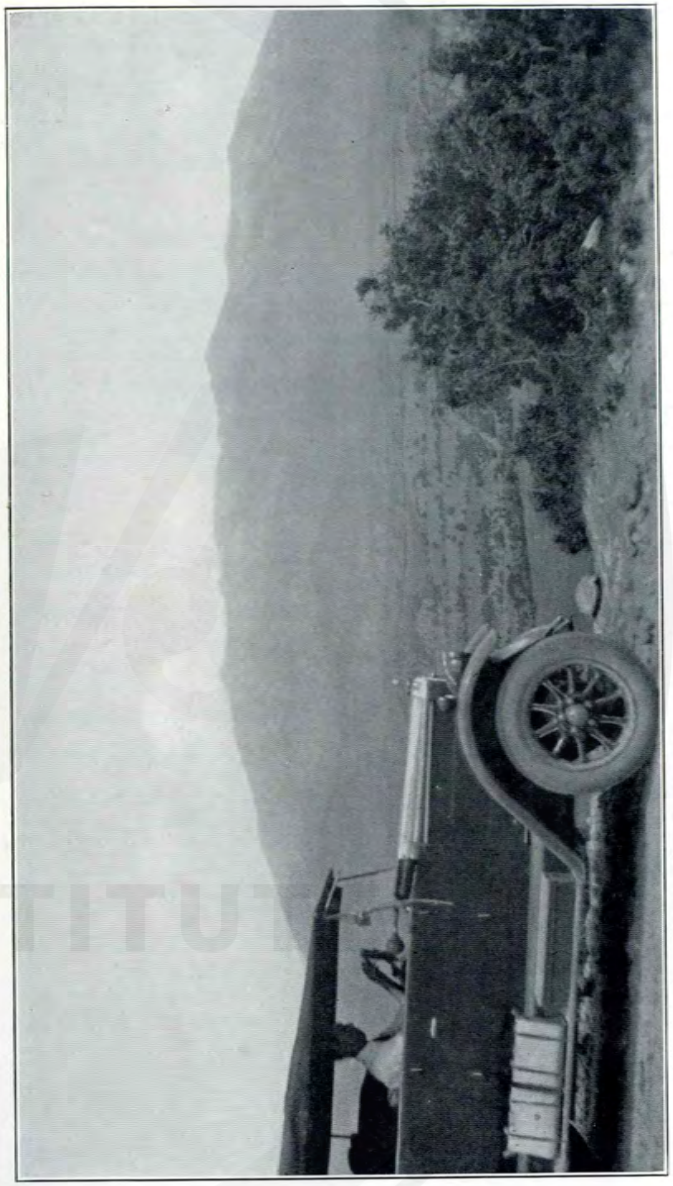
GREECE (*continued*)

OLYMPUS AND THE CENTRAL GRECIAN MOUNTAINS

If our supper in Kozani had not been a great success, our breakfast there next morning was even less acceptable to a cultivated palate. Possibly, however, our mood was hyper-critical, since we had just arisen after a night of intense discomfort. We had not been so foolish as to attempt to sleep *in* our beds, but in spite of all precautions, such as the spreading of a barricade of rugs and of our private sheets on top of them, we had suffered acutely from the voracity of the local fauna. Nothing less than armour plating can daunt the ardour of the Grecian flea!

Henry was the first to appear, and we therefore sent him across to the "Amurrican" eating establishment to order some eggs and other provender of a simple nature. Providing himself with a pencil and notebook, he set out to interview the chef.

I wish that I could have seen the pair of them in conference. Henry's first move was



The Greek mountains in the neighbourhood of Mount Olympus.

to draw a life-like portrait of a hen. Near the hen he depicted a string of about a dozen eggs. The three which lay closest to the bird, presumably those which had been laid most recently, he singled out for special commendation, indicating that these were the eggs that he particularly desired.

The next picture showed a kitchen range and a saucepan. The eggs were just being placed in the saucepan, and the clock on the wall near by pointed to eight o'clock. Finally, the eggs were shown being taken out and placed in egg-cups, the clock now pointing to four minutes past eight. Henry handed all his drawings to the chef, and sank back with the pleased expression of one whose duty is accomplished.

The chef said, " I get you, bo'," and proceeded to " register " the true American " hustle " as depicted on the films. Five minutes later he returned, grinning all over his greasy face. In his hand he bore a black and shrivelled object, faintly reminiscent of an omelette that had seen hard times the previous year and had never properly recovered. This revolting dish he placed before Henry with every circumstance of self-satisfaction and joy in a job well done.

Henry, for once in his life, was speechless, and we could only pat his hand and murmur words of sympathy. Soon, however, we were to suffer an even more painful trial. The proprietor, true to his imported traditions, endeavoured to

add to the gaiety of the proceedings by sending his little daughter into the next room, where, with a determination worthy of a better cause, she gave a vigorous rendering of " Valencia " on the family harmonium. In strict one-step time we were forced to stab at our leathery viands, sometimes almost completely penetrating the tough surface in our enthusiasm! Oh America, what crimes are committed in thy name!

Feeling pale and shaken, we returned to our hotel, and were soon bidding farewell to our mentor of the previous night in a few choice Transatlantic phrases. The latter very kindly insisted on sending a youth with us as far as the end of the town with instructions to see us safely on to the Larissa-Athens road. The young man accordingly jumped on the running board, and enlivened our progress for the next quarter of a mile by keeping up an incessant tooting on the horn which happened to be within his reach. Evidently he had already mastered three parts of the art of driving as understood in the Balkans!

For the first few miles we drove over a cart track, which, however, proved surprisingly good and compared very favourably with the conventional type of road. In the rainy season, no doubt, it would have been impassable, but in the summer it was remarkable only for the number of tortoises which wandered over it, many of

these being in a moribund condition owing to the iron-shod wheels of the peasants' carts. The live ones added considerably to the task of driving, since my wife firmly refused to let me run over any more.

Many strange birds and insects crossed our path, unlike any that we had seen before. One bird in particular attracted our attention, being beautifully coloured and having a predilection for sitting on the telephone wires which ran alongside the track. We never saw it in any other setting, and it was therefore as the " Telephone Bird " that we referred to it.

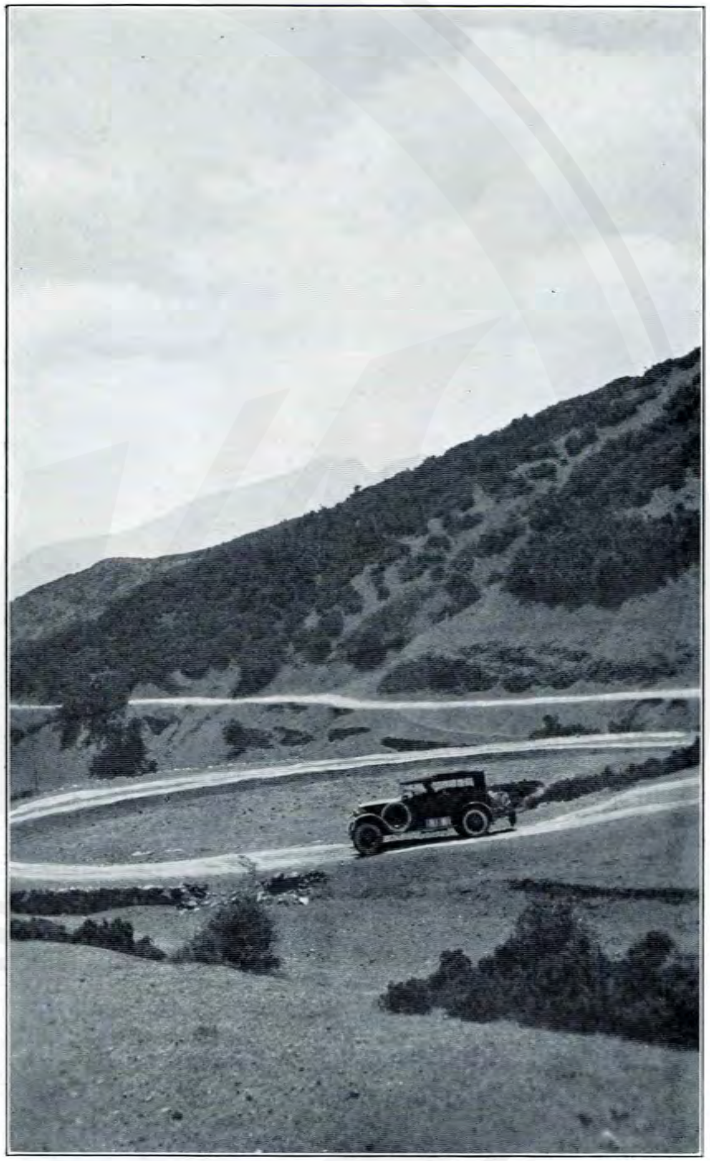
Eagles were not uncommon, and vultures were also to be seen. Once, when we came across the carcass of a sheep lying by the roadside, we were able to count at least a dozen eagles and vultures together. The latter are repulsive-looking creatures, and I drew my revolver to shoot one, but the whole crowd rose and flopped off just too soon.

By midday we were not far from Mount Olympus, the mythical home of the gods and goddesses of ancient Greece. Looking at it from the inland side, those who have visualised romantic rocky pinnacles and towering crags would probably be disappointed. Olympus is a fine mountain, and one of the highest in Europe, but it dwindles to quite ordinary proportions by comparison with the ridges and uplands that surround it. If I were to pass that way again, I should prefer to view it from the sea.

One blessing, however, the ancient gods vouchsafed us. From the slopes of their mountain a cooling stream ran down, crossed at one point by an exceedingly rickety wooden bridge. Beneath this antiquated structure both shade and water were to be found—an ideal combination for the consumption of light refreshments. We submerged a bottle of lemonade for about ten minutes, after which it was almost cold enough to quench the intense thirst that we had already developed. It lacked some of the traditional qualities of nectar, but we were not disposed to be too critical.

By contrast, the heat of the plain into which we afterwards descended seemed intolerable. Trees are non-existent in Central Greece, and what vegetation there is consists merely of prickly scrub and occasional tufts of coarse grass. When lunch time came we looked in vain for another stream of water and another patch of shade. So absolutely arid were our surroundings that Miranda's hood appeared to provide the only available protection from the sun.

Accordingly we lunched for the first time without leaving our seats—an uncomfortable procedure owing to the lack of space. One or two locusts dropped in to take pot luck with us, seizing ravenously upon any crusts of bread that we let fall. Sundry other insects crawled about in the road. On consideration, I fancy that



One of the typical winding mountain roads of Central Greece.

these must have been young locusts in various stages of development, but at the time we classified them generally as "Bungos," reverting to the unscientific but expressive term that my wife had coined in Hungary.

Having completed our meal with a further potation of lemonade, this time definitely lukewarm, we pushed on once more. Soon we were climbing again, for a mountain ridge lay across our path. Except for the rather unusual number of Bungos, the road wound up and up in the conventional Greek manner to which we were already accustomed.

It was not long, however, before we realised that this wealth of insect life was something quite out of the ordinary. With every mile that we covered the ground seemed to be thicker with those that crawled and the air with those that flew. So serious, at length, did the Bungo menace become that one member of the party had to be continually on guard with a rolled-up map to preserve the driver from assault!

At first we had looked with interest on the teeming thousands of living creatures that surrounded us, but now, when thousands gave place to millions and millions to billions, curiosity changed to disgust. So solid was the procession in which this vast army moved over the road that every revolution of our wheels must have killed a score.

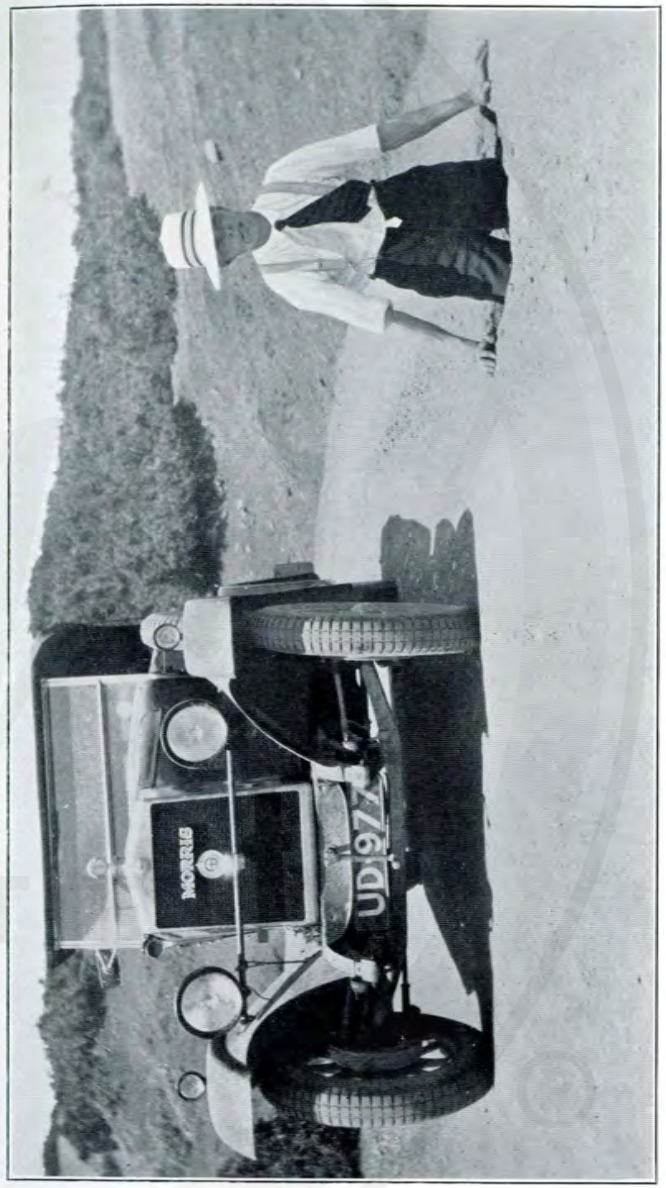
At one point it seemed that the very stones

were on the move, great boulders appearing to creep from left to right across our path. Our eyes were unable to comprehend the true state of affairs, for it was the teeming masses that surged from right to left that were the cause of this phenomenon.

Soon wheels and tyres were encrusted with squashed and mangled corpses, while the running boards were barely visible under the bodies of those that still lived and crawled. Festoons of the loathsome Bungos hung from the ground sheet that covered our luggage, several penetrated even under the bonnet and into the engine, while the ejection of those that, in their flight, flopped down among us in the tonneau occupied most of our time.

For the next few miles driving was a beastly business, but a still greater horror was in store for us. Right in the middle of the Bungo country a tyre suddenly punctured, bringing us to a reluctant standstill. Looking very hard at Henry, I called for volunteers to get out and change the wheel, but my most impassioned appeals met with no response whatever.

I could not blame him. The idea of descending into the road and grovelling about with a jack was really too unpleasant to bear consideration. The only alternative was to blow up the tyre by means of Miranda's engine-driven pump, and to race ahead so long as any air remained in it. This we did, progressing in a series of hundred-



A typical pot-hole in a Greek main road. The Author, who is over six feet in height, is standing upright.

yard sprints until at last we had left the main army of insects behind us.

It was not until we had repeated the process *ad nauseam* that open ground was reached. Then, while the wheel was being changed, we endeavoured to do a little very necessary "spring cleaning." I do not know how many of the creatures, dead or alive, we scraped off the exposed parts of the chassis. The number must have run into several hundreds, however, since we found many clusters of six or eight together!

We were still at work when a few scouts, flying on ahead, caught up with us, a warning that the Bungo army was still close behind us and advancing as steadily as ever. We needed no further inducement to complete our task in the shortest possible time, and two minutes later we were making good our escape with feelings of sincere relief.

* * * * *

The remainder of our journey to Larissa was comparatively uneventful, my chief memories of it being dust, heat, and pot-holes. The distance, fortunately, was not great, so that it was still daylight when, having crossed the old Turkish frontier line, we entered the little town that had once been the northern outpost of the Greeks.

Even to-day Larissa is a place of some importance, for it is garrisoned by a considerable

military force. From Salonika we had brought an introduction to the colonel commanding one of the regiments, and we therefore spent some time bumping around very dirty and uneven streets in an attempt to find him. Luck, however, was against us, for an orderly contrived to make us understand that he was away on leave.

Returning to the central square, we endeavoured to negotiate with the proprietor of what appeared to be the principal hotel. While we were thus engaged an officer turned up, introducing himself as the colonel's deputy, and by his aid we were able to explain our wishes fairly clearly. Unfortunately, it transpired that the hotel was full with the exception of one solitary room (price one-and-sixpence, to be paid in advance). Since the other smaller hotels would almost certainly exceed this one in dirtiness, we decided to make the best of a bad job and to close with this offer at once.

The problem of what to do with Henry remained to be solved. Rejecting the suggestion put forward by the management that he should sleep in the passage, we allotted him a corner of the communal bedroom. Screens were produced, and an improvised partition set up. Being old and exceedingly dusty, however, these satisfied the dictates of decorum only at the expense of ventilation, and the degree of stuffiness achieved must have been almost unique.

A very indifferent dinner followed, served by

a waiter whose incompetence I have rarely seen equalled and never surpassed. To every request he replied "Yais, yais, all right," whereupon he would dash off, returning a little later with some article of food that was manifestly very much "all wrong." Much vituperation failed completely to damp his sunny and optimistic nature.

After dinner we instituted a shopping expedition, laying in a large store of eggs and bottled lemonade. The latter we had now adopted as being rather more cooling than beer. The local tradesmen must have thought that we were gathering provisions to withstand a siege, but, knowing how long a run still lay before us, we were determined not to run short. Athens was to be our goal next day, and several ranges of mountains lay directly in our path.

We retired early to our modest bedroom, hoping for the best, although, being now acquainted with Greek hotels, instinct told us that we should not sleep alone. Our fears were only too well founded. That stuffy little apartment had seemed cheap at eighteen pence when we had hired it, but we soon began to think that we had been overcharged. After all, one can visit the London Zoo for sixpence, and the study of zoology was the only pursuit for which our surroundings were naturally fitted!

The heat, even after dark, was so great that it was impossible to wrap oneself up in rugs.

Personally, I placed one of our own sheets and a dressing-gown beneath me, and slept on top with my pyjama trousers tucked into a pair of socks. Needless to say, these precautions proved totally inadequate, and a number of energetic young fleas were soon making their usual hearty meal.

At dawn my wife awoke us, and nobly rallied round with an invaluable cup of tea. Outside our windows the storks on the neighbouring housetops were greeting the first rays of the sun in the manner that is peculiar to them, clapping their long beaks together, and producing a sound that I can only compare to that of castanets.

While the others were packing I went out to collect the car. Miranda had been left overnight in a military stables, and a number of soldiers still lay asleep around her. As was natural, they were by no means enthusiastic when I awakened them by starting up the engine, and I was greeted by a few rich Greek oaths! By the time I had returned to the hotel a few people were about, and we were able to procure some sort of a breakfast.

The morning was still fresh and cool when we jolted our way out of Larissa, employing one of the local youths to pilot us as far as the Athens road. There seemed every prospect, however, of another day of grilling heat to come, and we therefore tried to push on as fast as possible

while conditions were in our favour. As for the road surface, it remained thoroughly bad, yet no worse than what we were now beginning to expect.

There were no signposts, of course, to guide us, and we had no map that was of any real value, yet we continued to find our way with comparative ease. A Greek road has few turnings, and the sun, which was always very much in evidence, could be used as a guide if we were ever in doubt. Moreover, every Greek, however illiterate, has heard of Athens, and knows roughly in what direction it lies.

The wooden bridges caused us the most concern, for many of these seemed to be in the last stages of decay. Heavy laden as we were, it was a nerve-racking business to entrust ourselves to some of them. Once, indeed, after a brief tour of inspection on foot, I decided not to take the risk, and we therefore drove down into the dry river bed and, by a gallant effort on the part of Miranda, succeeded in climbing out over the opposite bank.

Wonderfully beautiful was the country through which we passed. Larissa lies in a plain, but to the south are mountains, ridge after ridge of them, with sunlit valleys in between. Views that would be magnificent at any time are rendered more striking by the warm colouring of the landscape, comprising every shade from rich brown to palest gold. At each turn of the

road some new panorama lay spread out before us, backed always by yet another chain of distant peaks.

What these ranges lack in height—for they do not, in this respect, bear comparison with Olympus—they make up in steepness, so that it was by no means unusual for us to climb in a low gear for half an hour or more at a stretch. On such occasions the driver had to keep his eyes firmly fixed upon the road, hairpin bends being sharp and loose boulders numerous—a fact that I much regretted, since it debarred me from appreciating much of the scenery below.

In one particularly exquisite valley we stopped for refreshments, having found a stream in which a selection of our lemonade bottles could conveniently be cooled. One of the poets, I forget which, tells of a place "where the mountains run down to the sea." Our immediate surroundings might well have been his inspiration, since it is comparatively rarely that mountains *do* run down directly to the sea. They did so here, a narrow gulf sparkling in the sun between two ridges on our left. Not far away, had we only known it, was the famous Pass of Thermopylæ.

From this point onward occasional trees began to reappear. It was under a tree, in fact, that we took our next meal—a combination of lunch and tea. This sufficed us until the evening, by which time we were descending by gradual stages

out of the mountainous country and into a broad and level plain.

* * * * *

We were still crossing this plain when darkness fell. Not knowing exactly where we were, and unwilling to waste time by stopping for dinner *en route*, we pushed on doggedly in the belief that we might reach Athens for supper. When, however, the hours passed and we still found ourselves apparently "miles from anywhere," we were wise enough to take the precaution of fortifying ourselves with coffee and other delicacies obtained from the roadside villages.

Three or four times we called a brief halt for this purpose, gulping down black coffee and hurrying on again. Then, when all the village cafés had put up their shutters for the night, and we looked in vain for any sign that we were approaching our destination, we were forced to settle down in preparation for another all-night run.

To make matters worse, the road, which had never been good, now began to deteriorate still further. One is forced to the conclusion that Balkan roads are only repaired about once in every century. Thus those in the outlying districts fall gradually into decay, whereas those within fifty miles of a big city are pounded equally surely, but much more rapidly, into a mass of ruts and craters. Having reached one

of the latter zones, our progress was correspondingly slowed down.

At about one o'clock in the morning yet another range of mountains barred our path. This provided the stiffest climb of the entire run, since the surface was so atrocious that it was out of the question to attempt to " rush " the steeper gradients. We were never able to give the engine its head, and a great deal of normal third-gear work had therefore to be done slowly and laboriously in " second."

By the time the summit was passed we were all tired out, for we had been driving practically since sunrise. Once more, as in Bulgaria, we resorted to the bottles of Slivovitz which had accompanied us all the way from the Schloss Breiteneich in Austria. Once more the tang of the good liquor enlivened us, and we pressed on the more cheerfully for our potations.

A long, wearisome stretch of level ground followed, and we had almost come to the conclusion that we had lost our way when suddenly a curious sound came to our ears above the beat of the engine. It was a heavy, surging sound, and for a moment we were at a loss to account for it. Then, on a bend, our headlights gleamed on water, and, like the Greeks of history we cried " Thalassa, thalassa ! " for we realised that we had found the sea.

It was quite unreasonable, but the sight of the waves convinced us that Athens could not

be very far away. Apart from the fact that Athens is within a few miles of the coast, there was no real justification for such a supposition. As it happened, however, we did see lights ahead of us very shortly after.

To see Athens was one thing, but to find our way into it was quite another. This occupied a tedious time, and we wandered long through suburbs, but at last we got as far as the railway station, where a coffee stall was still doing business. Dawn was just breaking as we drew up, and Henry was already sleeping the sleep of utter exhaustion in the back of the car. Nothing less than the sight of a coffee cup could have roused him.

From an early workman we obtained directions, and stood him a cup of coffee in exchange. Ten minutes later a very ragged crew stood on the doorstep of the smart and exclusive Hotel Grande Bretagne, clamouring for admission in the pale grey light. The two male figures bore beards of three days' growth, while even the female figure had lost something of that " Bond Street " appearance. It really does great credit to the perception of the night porter that he consented to let us in.

CHAPTER XIII

GREECE (*concluded*)

ATHENS AND THE ISLES OF GREECE

My impressions of our first eight hours in Athens may be recorded briefly in the one word "nil." I slept literally "like a log," and it was lunch time before any of us felt equal to the task of getting up. Then, after a visit to the hotel restaurant, a belated move was made toward the outside world.

We were quite unprepared, however, for what awaited us from the moment that the hall porter flung wide the doors and we stepped out into the street. I believe that I have mentioned from time to time the fact that it is hot in Greece. We realised within the first five seconds that ordinary Greek heat is as a gentle glow compared with the heat of Athens. Personally, I staggered rather than walked the first few yards along the pavement, almost blinded by the intensity of the sunshine!

The city of Athens, as we now perceived, lies in a hollow surrounded by hills. It is a genuine sun-trap, and even the natives find it too hot

to do any work in the afternoon. All business comes to a standstill between lunch and tea time, and the true Athenian either sleeps or sips lemonade in the shelter of his club. As for unwary visitors, one can almost see their northern energy shrivelling and drying up from the roots.

It required a strong effort of will to cover even the short distance to the Greek Auto Club on foot. Here we at once met with a most cordial reception. The president, a colonel in the army and a reputed millionaire, proved to be one of the most charming men that I have ever met. Many English people hold rather a low opinion of the Greeks as a nation, but I can assure them that the true Greek gentleman, who is not by any means such a *rara avis* as some would have us believe, is a gentleman indeed.

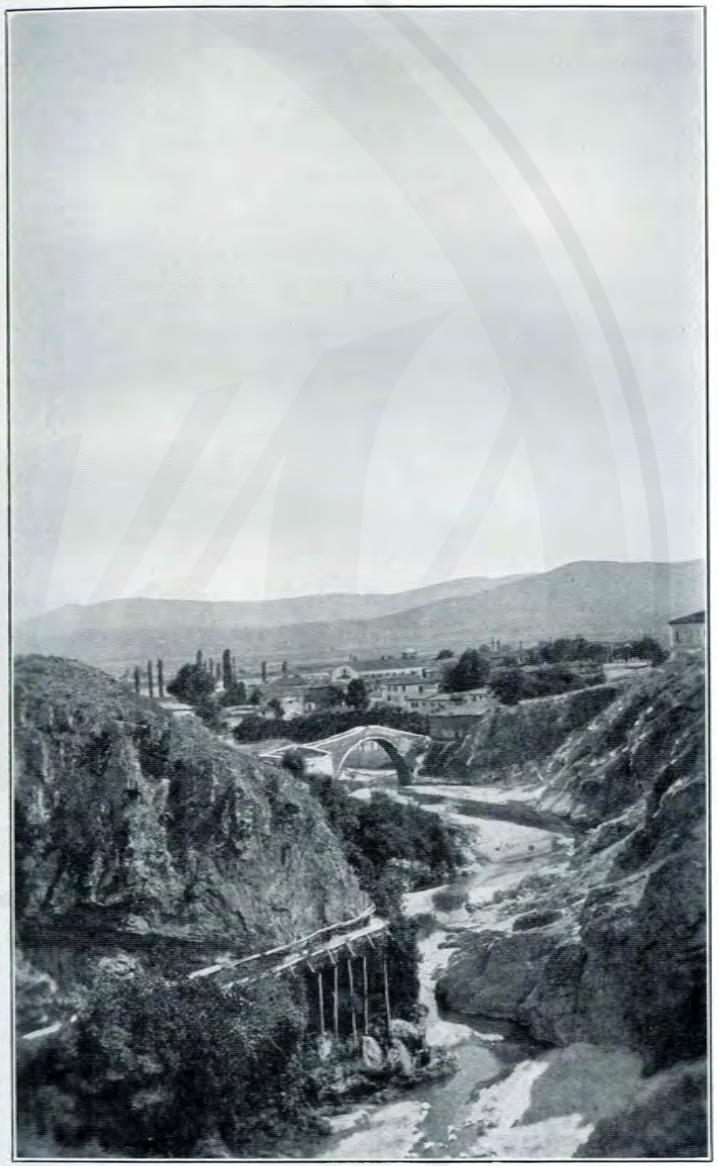
Two other notable characters were introduced to us, of whom one was an official of the club, a lean and withered little man, and the other a director of one of the leading Anglo-Athenian motor firms, small, round, and normally good humoured. They were an amusing pair, for outwardly they were the best of friends, and always addressed each other as "my dear fellow" or "my good Tintopoulos." Actually they were rivals, for each believed profoundly in his own acumen, and privately considered the other a fool. One or other of them would take us aside every now and again and explain confidentially that "dear old So-and-so is such a charming

fellow—one of my best friends, you know—but I ought to tell you that he persistently talks through his panama. Such a pity, because he means so well."

I am sorry to say that we formed one of their chief bones of contention. We had asked for assistance in arranging for Miranda to be shipped from the Piræus to the Golden Horn. Of course they held entirely opposite theories as to the best means of effecting this business. Both could ordinarily discuss their differences calmly, but occasionally some very vexed question of procedure would crop up, and then both would burst out simultaneously into a regular torrent of verbiage, each trying to talk faster and more loudly than the other.

To hear two Greeks in the full flood of an impassioned argument is a liberal education in itself. It is generally held that the winner is he who can, by sheer lung power, drown the contentions of his opponent. Thus the discussion takes the form of a gradual crescendo, the words ever tumbling faster, and the voices ever rising higher. On these occasions we would sit spell-bound in our chairs, dazed by the sheer magnificence of a wordy combat conducted in three languages, and marvelling at the relentless cataract of sound.

In calmer moments, however, we were made to feel very much at home. The amenities of the club were put at our disposal, and each day



One of the isolated villages of Central Greece.

before lunch we would forgather with our Greek friends to drink the equivalent of a cocktail. The national drink is a liquor known as *ooze-o* (I spell it as it is pronounced), which is sometimes drunk neat and sometimes with water. In either case it seems equally nasty to those who taste it for the first time, but no doubt we should have grown to like it had we had time to become acclimatised to it. As it was, we found the company more agreeable than the refreshments.

One afternoon a reception was given in our honour, at which we met some of the members of the English colony. Prominent among these was the Guardee—as perfect a specimen as ever graced the parade ground. It is really amazing how some Englishmen manage to retain their characteristics, even in a completely foreign atmosphere. He was a source of great interest to the Greeks, and his distinctively hearty laugh had achieved quite a reputation in the city. It was rumoured that distinguished strangers were walked up and down outside his office to hear it!

In the evenings we would drive a mile or two out of Athens to dine, and, when cool enough, dance at one or other of the many restaurants which fringe the seashore. The epicure could find no more delightful setting for his meal, for every night the moon shone out of a cloudless vault of starlit sky, leaving a silvery track

across the unruffled waters. Along the coast twinkled the haphazard lights of the Piræus, and music from distant orchestras was borne faintly on the windless air; yet there were times when it seemed positively debased to sit soullessly eating in such surroundings, and almost worse to dance the wild continental version of the Charleston. The slow waltz or the tango should, one felt, hold undisputed sway.

The life of these open-air restaurants, however, is precarious, for the Athenians of the present day differ very little from their forefathers, of whom, in the time of Saint Paul, it was said that "They . . . spend their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing." Many things have altered since the Acts were written, but not the desire for novelty among the citizens of Athens.

Thus the days passed pleasantly, and we gradually accustomed ourselves to the heat which had at first oppressed us. It still tended to make us lazy, but we took our exercise in occasional bathing expeditions along the coast. Swimming in the sea near Athens is sheer delight, for the water is so warm that the first plunge holds no terrors even for the timidest. The process of drying oneself afterwards is not laborious, since the sun does three parts of the work.

The visit which, of course, we paid to the Acropolis I have purposely not included among these more trivial amusements, since the

experience is one that stands out in my memory as a thing apart. It is impossible to stand, as we did, among those glorious ruins and remain entirely unmoved. Their beauty is as perennial as the solid rock upon which their foundations rest.

The Parthenon, perhaps the most famous of the world's great buildings, dates from the time when, under Pericles, Athens had reached the pinnacle of her fame. Until 1687 it stood, impervious to weather and unscarred by warfare, although degraded by the Turks to serve the purpose of a powder magazine. In the war between Venice and Turkey, however, a bomb from a Venetian mortar burst within it, and the explosion that followed reduced it to its present ruined state. But for this disaster, there can be little doubt that it would remain intact to-day.

I shall not venture to attempt a detailed description of what has already been so frequently described. Let the traveller climb the rocky heights of the Acropolis; let him disdain the advances of those who would take his photograph, and reject the proffered assistance of those who have memorised whole chapters of the guide book and are prepared to intone them in broken American for his benefit. If he would appreciate to the full the genius of the ancient craftsmen, he must wander alone amid this ruin of "the glory that was Greece."

If the Parthenon is beautiful, the background against which it is seen is hardly less so. Far below is the modern city, the clamour of its streets stilled by distance into a gentle murmur. Beyond and to either side rise hills, one of which, named "the mad," is so called owing to the amazing changes of colour which take place when the sun shines upon it from varying angles. Beyond the hills lies a dazzling sheet of blue water—the sea—and over all the sunshine is of a brilliance unknown to our northern climate. The jewel has a fair setting—the picture a fitting frame.

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Out last visit in Athens was paid, not to any ancient monument or temple, but to the very modern Turkish consulate at the Piræus. Here we completed the formalities necessary for our voyage to the Golden Horn, although hampered by the fact that Henry, who should have been present to sign on the dotted line, had got up late and gone to the Turkish embassy instead, a full two miles away. Not realising his mistake, and unable to make anyone understand him, it appears that he hung about the austere precincts of the latter until he was in grave danger of being arrested for behaving in a suspicious manner and failing to give an account of himself!

We also laid in a store of Turkish money, consisting of large paper notes attractively



The Author, with Lady Cardigan and "Henry" on the steps of the Temple of Theseus, Athens.

engraved. The unit of currency is the pound, or, as some call it, the lira, and a very useful denomination is the " fiver," a much more ornate, but less valuable, proposition than its English namesake. To safeguard our wealth, we took the precaution of memorising the numerals up to ten, but beyond this point our knowledge of Turkish hieroglyphics never went.

The following day we took leave of our good friends at the Auto Club. Miranda, we learned, had preceded us to Constantinople on another vessel, the rival factions having at last agreed upon this as the best method of effecting her transportation. We ourselves left for the docks that afternoon, piling our luggage into a separate taxi which we sent on ahead of us. Following in swift pursuit, we were able to see that the suitcases took no wrong turnings " by mistake."

Our own taxi was piloted by a Greek of peculiarly villainous aspect, and one of the worst drivers that it has ever been my painful fate to sit behind. He committed, one by one, all the motoring crimes known to science, and many more of his own invention. For instance, he would " coast " down the steeper portions of the streets, cheerfully reducing his control over the vehicle for the sake of a trifling economy in petrol. At other times his technique was simplicity itself. He would keep his foot hard down on the accelerator and his thumb hard down on

the electric horn, trusting to the latter to clear the road for him.

Again and again we were within an inch of disaster, but each time the strident shriek of the hooter and a desperate swerve kept us from actual harm. At last, however, the inevitable happened. We were nearing our destination when a youth started to run across the road in front of us. Like the fool that he was, our driver tried to dart between him and the pavement for which he was making. Far too late the brakes were crammed on, there was a sickening crash, and our unfortunate victim lay bleeding in the gutter.

Instantly a crowd gathered, including many eye-witnesses of what had occurred. With a good deal of satisfaction, we prepared to see the criminal torn limb from limb, this being undoubtedly the fate that he most richly merited. The hot-blooded Greeks, we felt, would know exactly how to deal with such a case, and Henry was already congratulating himself on the fact that, unless it was claimed by the widow, we should escape payment of the usual exorbitant fare.

To our great disappointment, however, nothing practical was done. Apparently the Athenians are so accustomed to the abominable style of driving that prevails in their city that such incidents arouse no more than passing comment. Instead of wild yells of vengeance, we heard only

words of the mildest disapproval. "Tut, tut," murmured the spectators, "the silly fellow ran the boy down. How careless of him. Such a pity, don't you think?" A policeman appeared, and shook a reproachful head. He registered a not unmanly emotion, almost akin to chagrin, as he picked the victim up.

There was nothing that we could do, so, having relieved our feelings by abusing our late driver in as many languages as we could muster, and having studiously omitted the customary "tip," we left him to straighten a bent mud-guard and walked away. At the end of the street we found our second taxi, piled ourselves on top of the luggage, and thus completed our journey in great discomfort but comparative safety.

The Piræus, the harbour of Athens, presents an amazing spectacle on occasions when steamers are due either to leave or to arrive. It possesses nothing so modern as a landing stage—the Greeks being behind the Turks in this respect—and all passengers have therefore to embark or disembark from small rowing boats, pulled by villainous-looking watermen who propel their frail craft with more vigour than precaution.

The uproar is terrific, for a hundred stout Greeks may simultaneously be arguing with the customs officials, haggling with their boatmen, and swearing at their jostling neighbours. The air sizzles with vituperation, the heavens are rent by frenzied curses, and a waving forest of hands

is flung up by those who, from sheer exhaustion and lack of breath, are momentarily speechless. No one, however, remains speechless for very long!

A hundred small boats struggle and fight for the envied position at the foot of the steamer's gangway. First one and then another is forced to one side by the weight of opposition, boatmen and passengers join in a scream of mingled fury and despair, and the newcomers in their turn are squeezed into outer darkness by yet more lusty rivals. Sometimes a boat will deliberately separate itself from the heaving mass, retire a few lengths, and then charge down at full speed in the hope of bursting open a path to the centre by its acquired impetus.

The gangway itself is a scene of wild confusion and is soon completely blocked. Those on deck then resort to the primitive expedient of flinging ropes over the side. To the ends of these their friends below attach suitcases and trunks, the luggage being hauled up hand over hand, swinging precariously from side to side and in instant danger of a headlong plunge into the sea.

After battling for half an hour, we succeeded in installing ourselves on board the *Semiramis*, a smart and comfortable Italian vessel running on the Brindisi–Athens–Constantinople route. We now had time to take stock of our surroundings, which were sufficiently striking to compel attention. Although so deficient in

modern amenities, the harbour is surrounded by blocks of imposing buildings, their façades, intensely white, being reflected in water intensely blue.

As we steamed slowly out we were able to catch a final glimpse of the city of Athens, lying about a couple of miles inland. Standing like a sentinel above the huddled groups of houses, the great rock of the Acropolis was clearly visible. Like a crown, the chaste pillars of the Parthenon rested upon its brow—the last landmark to disappear behind the low hills that line the shore.

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Until it became too dark to see more, the headlands and bays, the rocks and the islands, the ever-changing aspects of the Grecian coastline kept us on deck, even Henry scorning to obey the steward's summons to tea. Now that we were leaving it, we unanimously voted Greece the fairest land of any that we had yet seen, the memory of our trials and tribulations there being already a little blurred by the kindly haze of time.

The sun sank while we were threading our way between those "Isles of Greece" immortalised by Byron, cleaving a path through the burnished silver of the sea. Besides those marked upon the map, there are many which are little more than points of rock rising above the surface. Even

by moonlight a number of those which lay closest to our course could clearly be distinguished.

After dinner the passengers were able to occupy themselves according to their several tastes. For the gluttonous men and the winebibbers there were the conventional attractions of the smoking-room; for the devotees of the cinema an ancient American film with Italian sub-titles was shown in an improvised deck theatre. For those possessed of less mundane inclinations Nature was holding a carnival of her own, drawing all her worshippers to the seclusion of the upper deck.

It was instructive, yet deplorable, to observe the direction taken by the various diners as they left the saloon. I am ashamed to say that the lure of the cinema seemed to be too strong for most, while a distressingly large section of the remainder drifted in rather an apologetic manner towards the smoking-room door. The depraved nature of twentieth century man remains, alas, almost unchanged, even on a perfect night in the Ægean Sea.



The Author, with Lady Cardigan, on board the "Semiramis" between Athens and the Dardanelles.

CHAPTER XIV

CONSTANTINOPLE

AN ANCIENT CITY UNDER A NEW REGIME

Our first glimpse of Turkey was gained through the porthole of our cabin, the *Semiramis* having reached the Dardanelles just before breakfast time the following day. While we dressed we were able to inspect at close range the shores of the Gallipoli peninsula, and an arid and desolate coast it proved to be. It is hardly possible to imagine a more unpleasant district for the conduct of a war which, in itself, is already a sufficiently unpleasant business.

From the deck we were able to observe the Asiatic coast with equal clearness, and it is hard to say whether, at this point, Europe or Asia is the more depressing. Both appear equally parched and deserted—a fact which, unreasonably enough, caused us some surprise. One is accustomed to think of the two continents as being essentially different in character.

The town of Gallipoli marks the entrance into the Sea of Marmara, and the Island of Marmara soon appeared on our starboard bow. After this

we saw no more land until, in the afternoon, the minarets of the Turkish capital rose against the sky. Particularly imposing were those of the mosque of the Sultan Ahmed I, six in number, towering above the enormous dome.

Constantinople is divided into two main parts, the larger of which, Stamboul, is the ancient city founded by Constantine the Great on the site of the yet more ancient Greek colony of Byzantium. On the opposite side of the Golden Horn is Pera, the European quarter, containing a few hotels and one long street of shops. On the Asiatic side of the Bosporus lies Scutari, connected by ferry with Stamboul.

Stamboul can boast a landing stage, so that we had no difficulty in going ashore. A taxi, piloted by a ferocious-looking negro, was soon whisking us through narrow streets until, having paid a toll to cross the new bridge, we climbed the steep hill into Pera. Here we found a very comfortable hotel, next door to the English Club, of which we were at once made honorary members.

Before being allotted rooms, we had to fill up a lengthy form, giving numerous details as to our origin and business. Among other things, I had to state the number of my dependents travelling with me. "Wives—1." was the entry that I made. I thought at the time that the reception clerk seemed somewhat astonished at this way of putting it, but I could not immediately understand why. Then it dawned on me

that, in adding a dot after the figure 1, I had unwittingly formed the Turkish numeral 10! No doubt he was contemplating the addition of an annexe to the premises!

We dined that night at the Yildiz Palace—a fine modern building which once housed the ex-Kaiser and his suite. It is now utilised as the municipal casino, and is largely patronised both by wealthy Turks and foreign visitors. Some time ago an unsuccessful attempt was made to close it, the pretext being that it tended to lower the moral tone of the city. This was, in any case, absurd, since of all the centres of night life in Constantinople there is probably none more eminently respectable. Of immorality, apart from the debatable sinfulness of gambling, we saw nothing.

The spacious restaurant is arranged with the tables around the walls, the centre of the floor being left free for dancing. The Turks, however, seem to care little for this form of amusement, and for the most part the orchestra played in vain. Henry and my wife essayed a turn or two round the room, but soon, finding that they were giving what was practically a solo performance, became self-conscious and retired.

We amused ourselves, however, by studying the diners at adjoining tables, particularly the unveiled Turkish women. The majority were heavily painted—too heavily for our conservative taste, and, on the whole, we were disposed to

think that the abolition of the veil had been a mistake. In common with most Eastern women, the Turkish beauties have magnificent eyes, very large and dark and lustrous, whereas their other features are not able to maintain the same high standard. If one saw the eyes only one would be charmed; seeing the rest, one is apt to be disappointed.

We passed on after dinner to the roulette tables, changing into counters a few of our Turkish pound notes. I am afraid that I can have given the management but little satisfaction, for I played on a cautious system which enabled me, after about two hours of intense concentration, to relieve the bank of approximately five shillings. Henry, however, was more dashing, and staked his money liberally on the even chances. His fortunes fluctuated violently throughout the evening, and we would see him alternately elated with satisfaction over his latest "coup," or bowed down with sorrow after some sequence of catastrophes.

The Turks themselves are most assiduous gamblers, and the nightly winnings or losses of some of them must be very large. Their womenfolk are particularly keen, although not all of them are completely scrupulous in their play. I saw one woman—she was little more than a girl—cover the table time and again with counters, the total value of which must have amounted to five English pounds on each occasion. Whoever paid for her amusement must have been an indulgent man.

We visited some of the ancient buildings of Stamboul next day, among them the great mosque of Saint Sophia, originally, of course, a Christian church. Putting on loose slippers over our shoes, we went inside. Here and there it was still possible to discern the emblem of Saint Sophia's former faith. Thickly as Moslem decorations have been plastered and painted over it, the Cross remains faintly visible under the shadow of the crescent.

The mark of an open hand was pointed out to us, high up on one of the many pillars. To this a purely Turkish legend clings. It is said that, when the conqueror Mohammed II rode in triumph into the building, he placed his blood-stained gauntlet on this spot. We objected that even a tall man on a big horse could not reach so high, but were told that the floor was piled high with the corpses of those who had fallen before him.

Near by is the Old Seraglio, from the gardens of which a magnificent view of the Bosporus can be obtained. Within those grey walls there is much to see, so much that it is difficult to sort out one's impressions afterwards, but it was the Sultans' treasury that fascinated us most keenly. No miser in his wildest dreams could visualise such a wealth of gold and pearls and precious stones.

Thrones of solid gold we saw, each encrusted with many thousand gems; swords and daggers, their hilts ablaze with diamonds, emeralds, and rubies; even china plates and cups and saucers all bejewelled. The eye could not take in the half of it; the brain could not compute the hoarded riches there displayed.

Of greater interest, perhaps, to the historian were the robes of the various sultans, the name of the owner with the dates of his reign being marked on each. Henry, seeing an opportunity of improving his historical knowledge, pulled out a pencil and noted these dates in his pocket-book —an entirely innocent, and even laudable, preoccupation. Unfortunately, he was observed by one of the guardians of the treasury—a very obvious plain-clothes government detective.

The taking of notes, presumably for some nefarious purpose, aroused this gentleman from his self-imposed task of propping up one of the show cases, and stimulated him to an immoderate display of professional zeal. He bobbed to and fro behind Henry's back, trying vainly to decode the rows of figures that were being jotted down. Henry, quite well aware of what was going on, deliberately held his notes at the most inconvenient angle possible, thus keeping his pursuer in an agony of apprehension. Personally, I was vastly relieved when the quest for historical data ended before the handcuffs had been produced!

Among the many other interesting features of old Stamboul are the underground reservoirs —relics of the days when the city was still under Roman rule. There are several of these, still holding water and still used by neighbouring households, and into one of them we descended. It was an awe-inspiring place, so vast that its full extent could only be realised by rowing round it in a boat.

Imagine some primitive cathedral, its vaulted roof supported by row upon row of sturdy columns. Picture it flooded by water to a depth of many feet. Then only will you appreciate the stupendous scale on which the Romans provided for the necessities of the imperial city of Constantine the Great.

In the same district is the native bazaar, occupying what were formerly the Sultans' stables. Enormous stables they must have been, so large that they could easily have accommodated a regiment of cavalry. Thousands of stalls and little shops now pack the great building to overflowing, and a babel of sound arises from the merchants crying their wares.

One is tempted to spend a great deal of money in the bazaar, for all manner of goods, wrought in metal or woven in gaily-coloured silks, attract the eye. How much of the merchandise comes from Manchester I should not like to say; certainly not all is of genuine Turkish manufacture. In any case, Europeans intending to

make a purchase should not fail first to haggle in the conventional Eastern manner over the price.

The usual procedure is as follows. The customer strolls up to one of the counters and inquires tentatively about some article that appeals to him. The proprietor replies that, being in a generous mood, he is prepared to part with it for the trivial sum of fifteen lire. The customer thanks him and passes on.

Immediately afterwards an emissary rushes up to him and informs him that a similar, but slightly less expensive, article has just been discovered in the back of the shop. Astonished by this piece of good news, the customer then returns. He is invited into the little room behind the counter, and is shown the very thing he wants. The beaming proprietor announces that, as a special favour, he will be content with the ludicrously small payment of ten lire only.

The customer, however, is still dissatisfied, and murmurs something about having come out with only a few small notes in his pocket. Everyone looks pained, but the proprietor, who, in spite of all rebuffs, remains an essentially kind-hearted man, nobly conceals his disappointment. He actually invites the impoverished one to remain as his guest and to drink a cup of coffee at his expense.

Greatly touched, the customer agrees. Refreshments are brought, and the conversation turns to such innocent matters as the weather

and the local news. At last the moment of parting comes, and the proprietor, with tears in his eyes, entreats his guest to accept the coveted article as a personal gift, asking no more than the purely nominal sum of five lire in return. Overcome with gratitude, the latter now concludes the transaction on these terms.

Thinking it over later, both parties have equal cause to feel gratified with the results of their protracted interview. The customer has obtained for five lire goods originally valued at fifteen. The proprietor, on the other hand, has contrived, even at the lower figure, to make a profit of fifty per cent. less twopence expended on coffee. Thus is business conducted among the Turks.

The extra twopence is a particularly sound investment, since foreigners, and especially Englishmen, are quite unable to accept hospitality and afterwards leave empty-handed. We ourselves returned to Pera heavily laden, making only a brief detour to see the old city walls of Roman stone and brickwork.

These were first built by Constantine, and were later restored by Theodosius and others. They still stand, although now in a ruinous condition. Twenty-six times have they been besieged, and eight times captured, so that to every yard of them hangs a tale of fierce slaughter, of stubborn defence and desperate attack.

* * * * *

A week or two could be spent very pleasantly in Constantinople, the climate being less oppressively hot than that of Athens, but after a few days we were forced to think about our journey home. It was necessary for my wife to hurry back to England, and we therefore arranged for Henry to accompany her on the Orient Express. From Paris they were to cross the Channel by air, reaching Croydon after four days of travelling.

This seemed to be the most expeditious route available. A good alternative would have been the seaplane journey via Athens to Brindisi, whence fast trains run to Rome and Paris. Unfortunately the service of seaplanes had temporarily been suspended by the Turkish government.

Every now and again, we were informed, the Turks take this arbitrary action. A message then arrives post-haste from the Greek Government, inquiring why the seaplanes have been banned. No immediate answer can ever be given to this question, but in due course, that is to say about a month later, a Turkish committee sits to investigate the whole affair. As a result of their deliberations it is discovered that there is no good reason for the suspension of the service, and the ban is accordingly lifted.

I cannot vouch for the accuracy of this statement, but I can well believe that it is only a slight exaggeration of the truth. At any rate, no seaplanes were running at time of which I write,

nor could anyone tell us either why they had been stopped or when they would be allowed to run again.

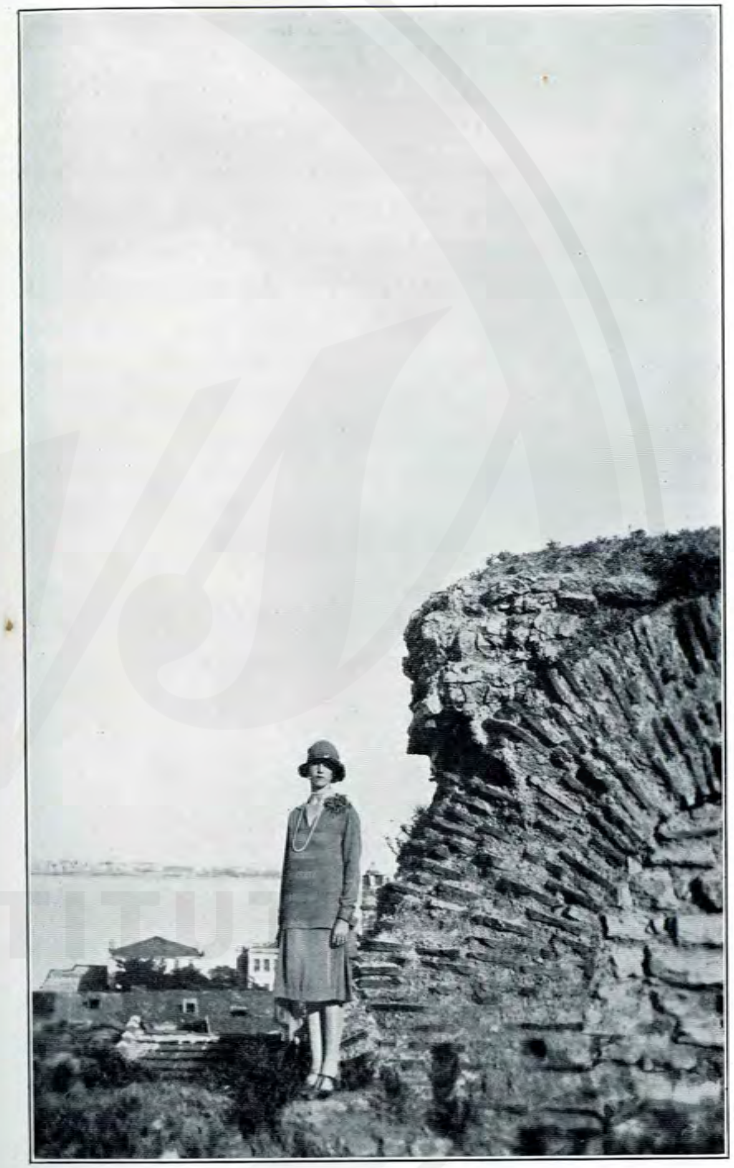
Judging by what Lady Cardigan told me afterwards, the long train journey between Constantinople and Paris must have been inexpressibly tedious—particularly so in view of the intense heat-wave then prevailing in the north of Italy. The first thousand miles were covered at a steady average speed of about twenty m.p.h., and on the rare occasions when other trains were encountered a halt would be made, so that the two drivers could indulge in a pleasant chat before proceeding. In Bulgaria, the arrival of a half brick through the carriage window, although it nearly decapitated my wife, served at least to break the monotony of this slow-motion progress.

My own homeward run with Miranda was not, I am glad to say, destined to be undertaken single-handed. An English resident in Pera, a former colonel of the Royal Engineers, volunteered to join me, and a very pleasant companion he proved to be. Always something of a " rolling stone," he had seen service during the war both with the British Army and with Dennikin's " White " Russians. At a later date he had taken charge of one of the principal Turkish railroads, the capital of which was owned by a group of London bankers, only leaving this employment when the Turks, without any attempt at compensation, confiscated the whole concern.

It seems that the Turkish government, although admittedly impoverished, is quite indifferent to the possibilities of foreign trade. Everything possible is done to discourage the European business man from investing his money in the country, very little security exists for any form of enterprise, and prohibitive tariffs are imposed without any previous notice being given. It is surprising that a professedly progressive administration should adopt so short-sighted a policy.

From the colonel I learned much of the events which took place in Constantinople during the Allied occupation. Particularly interesting was his account of the removal of the last Sultan, whose life was in danger owing to political intrigues, to the safety of one of the British battleships then lying in the Bosporus. At the appointed time a regiment of the Guards turned out for an hour's drill in front of the palace, continuing stolidly to form fours, slope arms, and perform similar martial evolutions until the fugitive had taken his departure unmolested.

Similar happy "coincidences" took place throughout the city. At each potential danger point a lorry, loaded with British troops, contrived to have a breakdown. The respective drivers climbed down and fiddled about with sparking plugs and spanners, the passengers, however, remaining in their places and toying in a bored manner with their rifles. It was only



Lady Cardigan on the old walls of Constantinople. The Asiatic coast can be seen across the Bosporus.

when a powerful car, heavily curtained, had raced past in the direction of the docks that any " repairs " could be effected.

* * * * *

I myself left Constantinople on the day following the departure of my wife and Henry. I had originally intended to drive in a north-westerly direction through Adrianople and Philippopolis to Sofia; but, being pressed for time, finally decided to go by sea as far as the Rumanian port of Constanza. At Bucharest, a day's journey inland, the colonel, having concluded his outstanding business in Turkey, agreed to meet me. Being cast in an heroic mould, he was to cross the Bulgarian mountains in a Franco-Rumanian aeroplane.

Miranda was therefore placed on board the *Principessa Maria*, a small but not uncomfortable vessel flying the merchant colours of Rumania, in which I had already reserved a berth. By midday my few belongings, now consisting chiefly of soiled and ragged garments, were packed, and soon afterwards I was lounging on deck, watching the shores of the Bosporus slip by on either side. The peaceful waters of the Golden Horn lay behind me, and the Black Sea ahead.

Glancing back, I realised that it was indeed one of Europe's most beautiful cities that I was leaving. Constantinople is seen at its best from

the sea, and not even the wooded slopes around Therapia could oust from my mind the thousand and one minarets as I had last beheld them, lit up by the sun with a splendour that was truly Oriental.

I must confess that I turned in that night in rather a melancholy mood. Having passed the turning point of our "Miranderings" (the pun is not my own), I had now set my face toward England, home, and the things of every day. It is a far cry, however, from the Bosporus to the Thames, and travel, even homeward travel, through the Balkans is apt to be anything but monotonous. As it turned out, I should have done better to have postponed my regrets until I was at least north of the River Danube.



The Mosque of the Sultan Ahmed at Constantinople.

CHAPTER XV

THE HOMEWARD RUN

THROUGH RUMANIA FROM EAST TO WEST

It is said, although the encyclopædia does not endorse this theory, that the Black Sea, alias the Euxine, was so called by the ancients owing to its unreliable and treacherous nature. Certainly the Greeks, who eventually named it "εὐξεῖνος" or "friendly," had originally referred to it as "ἀξεῖνος" or "inhospitable." My own experience, at any rate, amply justifies the appellation "black."

The surface, when I first retired to my cabin, was as calm as the proverbial mill-pond. Hardly a ripple was to be seen, and the air was warm and still. This, not unnaturally, lured me into disregarding my usual meticulous precautions. For the sake of ventilation, I left my porthole open, and I omitted to fortify myself with certain drugs which, being a bad sailor, I had prudently brought from England.

At about two o'clock in the morning, however, my sleep was interrupted by a most unpleasant form of nightmare. It seemed to me that some

malignant being was pouring a jug of icy water down my back. So vivid was this impression that I awoke in a state of considerable annoyance. Then, alas, it dawned on my returning consciousness that my diagnosis of the situation had been only too correct. The devils of the Black Sea had arisen while I slept, and had whipped the waters into a furious squall. The open porthole had, of course, offered a direct invitation to the first big wave!

I had not realised before how much damage a single wave can cause. This one had soaked me to the skin, reduced my bunk to a morass, and formed a lake on the cabin floor. It had also invaded my two suitcases, converting at least half my slender stock of clothing into a wet and soggy mass!

For the next ten minutes my time was fully occupied. The porthole had to be closed, and dry raiment substituted for my drenched pyjamas. The entire contents of my luggage had to be sorted out, those articles which had escaped the deluge being carefully separated from contact with those which had suffered. To make matters worse, I contrived to lose in my confusion the bottle containing my invaluable "anti-seasick" preparation.

I will not dwell upon the result of this last misfortune. Those who, like myself, are endowed by Nature with a delicate internal structure will appreciate the full horror of what

ensued, whereas those who are made of sterner stuff are best spared the recital of sufferings which they can never hope to understand. Let it suffice to say that I was soon quite indifferent to the fate of the storm-tossed *Principessa Maria*.

It was a hopeless dawn that broke some hours later. We were still wallowing in a heavy sea, and the atmosphere in my cabin was still abominably damp and clammy. The only heartening reflection left to me was that we were momentarily drawing nearer to the Rumanian coast. The harbour of Constanza is a depressing place, but I welcomed it almost with enthusiasm when at last we steamed into its relatively calm and untroubled waters.

As soon as I was sufficiently recovered I dressed and went on deck. I wanted to unload Miranda at once, but was informed that no work of any sort could be done until two hours later. There was nothing for it but to fill in the time by tramping up to the town and breakfasting at one of the local restaurants. This I did, and was rewarded by a peculiarly unappetising meal, of which the coffee was the only item that I can remember without a pang.

At the appointed hour I presented myself once again at the harbour, and this time found the customs officials ready and almost willing to undertake the necessary formalities. Innumerable forms were filled up, and a considerable sum of money extracted from me—whether

justly or otherwise I was never able to discover. After this the business of unloading was soon completed, although much time was subsequently wasted while I searched for a police station at which my passport could be stamped.

The streets of Constanza were already crowded and busy before I was eventually able to leave, and I was conscious of many curious glances as I drove through them. Certainly both Miranda and I must have presented a somewhat battered appearance as a result of our voyage. The car had suffered from the clumsiness of the Rumanian sailors, and was largely filled with the brown paper parcels which contained the damaged portions of my wardrobe, while my own normally commonplace exterior had gained an unwonted piquancy from the ruinous state of my Bulgarian straw hat. The latter had been soaked in sea water and afterwards laid out to dry. Left to itself, it might or might not have recovered from its immersion; as it was, I had added the finishing touches by inadvertently placing a heavy suitcase on top of it!

Taking a westward turning outside the town, I settled down to my lonely run to Bucharest, hoping to reach civilisation again in time for dinner. The road, however, proved to be very poor, and although, made callous by the knowledge that I was jarring nobody's spinal column except my own, I charged successive lines of pot-holes at a higher speed than usual, it was

not possible to maintain a decent average. Before I could reach Silistra the best of the day was over.

The country, for the most part, consisted of open down-land, somewhat reminiscent of the wide sweeps of Salisbury Plain, and the fact that I could usually see my route for two or three miles ahead made this slow progress more than ordinarily tedious. It was already evening before I was encouraged by the sight of the Danube flowing seaward on my right, and dusk before I descended a gradual slope into the little river port of Turtucaia.

I lost no time in making my way to the shore, for here I hoped to be able to hire a barge for the conveyance of Miranda. After some discussion, I contrived to make the local boatmen understand what was required, and an antiquated vessel, more like a large punt than anything else, was produced for my inspection. I foresaw an awkward job in driving the car on board, since both bow and stern were built high out of the water; nevertheless, with the aid of two sets of planks and a great deal of gratuitous advice from the rapidly collecting crowd of bystanders, I made the attempt and succeeded.

My gratification at having accomplished this feat was, however, destined to be short-lived. Almost at once I was approached by a Rumanian soldier—(Rumania is full of soldiers, by the way;

one can hardly walk down a street without stubbing one's toe against one or two)—and ordered to come ashore. I was given to understand that the crossing of the Danube is not permitted except under official surveillance.

Under military escort, therefore, I returned on foot to the main street of Turtucaia. On a balcony above the porch of one of the houses a stout gentleman, presumably a customs officer, was sitting, and to him I addressed my plea to be allowed to proceed to Bucharest. Had the official figure been less ample, and had my part of the dialogue not been confined to the one word "Bucuresti," the scene might well have been taken direct from the pages of "Romeo and Juliet"!

This pseudo-dramatic interlude ended at length in the required permission being granted, and again my hopes of spending the night amid the conveniences of civilisation were raised. I turned back toward the beach, but I had not gone far before I heard hasty steps behind me. The Army had taken up the pursuit, this time to inform me that, in addition to that of the customs officer, the blessing of the Mayor would be needed before my aquatic enterprise could finally be sanctioned.

This entailed a second expedition into the town, but eventually the Mayor was run to ground in the municipal bar, where he was refreshing himself in company with some of the

leading citizens. Whatever his merits as an administrator, his knowledge of modern languages proved elementary, but this deficiency he remedied at once by sending for his daughter, who spoke a few words of French. Painfully aware that my appearance was not prepossessing and that my own small store of French was exceedingly rusty, I did my best to enlist the young lady's sympathies on my side.

I believe that, to some extent at any rate, my efforts were successful. In an agony of suspense I waited while she laid my case before her father. I could see that she was urging him to let me go, whereas he was obviously reluctant to acquiesce. His reasons, I admit, were entirely creditable, although none the less annoying on that account. He was quite convinced that I should never land safely in the dark on the treacherous north bank, and he felt that my blood would be upon his head if any disaster were to occur.

I did not give in without a struggle. I pointed out that the demise of one obstinate Englishman in the Danube would hardly be a matter for profound sorrow to the Rumanian populace. Alas, it was all of no avail. My earlier attempts to ingratiate myself with the daughter were turned against me, for she also gradually came round to her father's point of view.

In the end I could only shrug my shoulders in the approved continental fashion, and retire

with the unsatisfactory assurance that I might resume my journey, if I wished, at dawn. Returning to the river bank, I unloaded my luggage and hired one of the boatmen to carry it to the best hotel. Miranda I decided to leave on board the punt.

Being anxious, however, not to have the tools and other accessories stolen, I looked round for some reliable person whom I could appoint to the post of night watchman. A sentry, who was pacing up and down near by, seemed to be the only candidate available. I approached him, therefore, rustling a bundle of notes carelessly in my hand. To explain my object in words was obviously impossible, so I resorted to the international language of the pantomime.

First I gave a graphic imitation of the thief advancing upon the deserted car. Then, adopting a fierce and military air, I depicted the manner in which my deputy should order arms, fix bayonets, and vigorously repel this cowardly attack. I think he understood; at any rate he grinned, tapped his rifle meaningly, and pocketed the wad of notes.

The best hotel in Turtucaia proved, as I had feared, to be rather a dingy little place. What was worse, it was very full, and the only accommodation I could secure was a half share of one small room. Having no alternative, I paid in advance for this, dumped my luggage, and set out again in search of dinner.

I soon found the restaurant patronised by the officers of the garrison. (Turtucaia, of course, is garrisoned, as is every other town throughout the country.) Here I obtained a dinner that at least was eatable, and got into conversation with the medical officer of the unit. The latter spoke French, and very kindly offered to help me if I encountered any further difficulties.

What he could not understand was what I was doing with a car in such a primitive part of the world. Why, for instance, should I jolt along over Balkan roads when I could travel in far greater comfort in a train? At last the solution struck him. He laughed, and said "Vous êtes 'sportsman,' n'est-ce pas? 'Sportsman' anglais, oui?"

I did not quite know how to reply to this question. The choice seemed to lie between the deprecating smile and the glad cry of *Vive le sport!* As it was, I admitted somewhat lamely that he had guessed correctly.

At any rate, he now held the key to my strange behaviour. To the continental mind, the word "sportsman" implies a mild form of lunacy. The afflicted person is generally considered to be harmless, but quite irresponsible in his actions. An "English sportsman" is merely an extreme case, and is capable of almost any form of folly.

We chatted for some time, but at an early hour I retired to my room at the hotel, intending

to rise with the sun next morning. My fellow lodger appeared to be a singularly unprepossessing individual, and was snoring loudly. As for my bed, I regarded it with the gravest suspicion. Nevertheless, I removed my boots, and, being somewhat tired after the disturbances of the previous night, was soon asleep.

* * * * *

I awoke just as the dawn was breaking, and at once made for the spot where the punt was moored. Everything seemed to be in order, although no boatmen were yet about. A coffee stall was open, however, and several cups of bitter black coffee served to keep out the early morning cold. Half an hour later my luggage was being reloaded, and a motor boat was being started up to tow me across the river.

It was certainly rather a precarious voyage. The two vessels were lashed side by side, an unconventional, and, as it seemed to me, a highly unscientific procedure. I felt distinctly relieved when I made a safe landing on a shingly patch of the northern bank, having had time, owing to the great width of the Danube, to warm up my engine to an efficient temperature while in mid-stream.

I was now within about forty miles of Bucharest so that I was able, in spite of very inferior roads, to reach the capital in time for a belated breakfast. Having bathed, shaved, and purchased

a Rumanian hat, respectable if unbecoming, in place of my Bulgarian relic, I soon contrived to resume my normal appearance of a decent citizen.

That afternoon the colonel, having flown from Constantinople, joined me. He seemed none the worse for his adventure, although he admitted to having experienced some anxious moments when caught in air-pockets over the mountains of Bulgaria. His nerve had been somewhat shaken at the start by tactless friends, who, having accompanied him as far as the aerodrome, had entered into a cheerful discussion of the details of the latest flying fatality on that particular route !

We left Bucharest together the following morning, ran northward through Ploesti, and lunched very pleasantly at Sinaia. In Brashov we took a westward turning, but unfortunately a misty rain began to fall soon afterwards, and we were not able to appreciate much of the mountain scenery to the south of us. At Hermannstadt-etc.-etc., we spent a tolerably comfortable night.

All the next day we journeyed westward, and by supper time were not far from the Hungarian frontier. Instead of stopping at Temesvar, however, we took the slightly more direct route to Arad. These two towns are very similar both in appearance and size, and at the latter we were able to find good, although unpretentious,

quarters. It seemed as though the complications of Balkan travel were almost over.

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The programme which we had planned for the morrow was an all-day run through Czegled to Budapest. Accordingly we set out after breakfast, and soon found an adequate road heading straight for the border and following the railway line. This brought us, after a few miles, to one of those dingy little villages which I had learned to associate with customs offices and frontier posts. Sure enough, we were greeted almost immediately by a Rumanian sentry.

To our surprise, however, the latter showed no inclination to lead us before his superior officer. He merely barred our way with rifle and bayonet, and indicated that we must turn back. Obediently we did so, after which we essayed various other exits from the village, feeling sure that one or other of them must lead us into Hungary. We explored every turning with persistent optimism, but with no immediate result.

Finally, as our quest brought us back past the sentry for the third or fourth time, that zealous soldier's suspicions were aroused. He signalled to us to stop, and promptly put us under arrest! We were led captive to the police station, where we had to undergo a strict cross-examination as to our identity and inten-

tions. The lack of a common language, of course, prevented this ceremony from being a complete success, but at last, when everything worth saying had been said twice over in an unintelligible tongue, we were exonerated from wilful guilt and permitted to proceed.

After this setback we retired a mile or two toward Arad, but soon returned to the attack, this time approaching the frontier line by a different road. Again we failed to penetrate the military defences, and were turned back by one of the ubiquitous sentries. It occurred to us, however, to seek out the headquarters of the local forces, and here we were fortunate in finding an officer who could converse with us in French. From him we learned the reason for our earlier unfriendly encounters with the authorities. For some reason best known to themselves, the Rumanians permit cars to enter and leave Transylvania only by way of Cenad or Oradea Mare, two places which are about a hundred miles apart!

This was disturbing news, for our own situation was somewhere between the two. We accepted gladly the offer of a guide to conduct us across country to the Cenad road. A slow and painful journey it proved to be, and we should certainly have got hopelessly lost but for the orderly whom our French-speaking friend sent with us.

For some time we ploughed our way along rutted cart tracks, but at last we came to a

river across which we had to be ferried in a barge. The method of operating this ferry was novel, but ingenious. A hawser was stretched from bank to bank, and two sets of ropes and pulleys at bow and stern secured the barge to the hawser. To obtain sufficient power for a crossing, it was only necessary to shorten one tackle and lengthen the other. Bow or stern would then swing out diagonally downstream, and the force of the current could be relied upon to do the rest.

On the opposite bank we found the road to Cenad, whereat the orderly, having been suitably enriched, took leave of us. We had still some way to go, and the surface left much to be desired. Nevertheless, we pushed on as fast as the pot-holes would permit, and contrived to reach the customs office just as it was getting dusk. We had wasted practically the entire day in wandering up and down the frontier!

The official in charge turned out to be my former acquaintance, but he did not welcome me with any great show of geniality. Indeed, but for the fact that he had shaved at least once since I had last seen him, he appeared to have changed hardly at all. He occupied the best part of another valuable hour in the filling up of forms, and it was dark long before he had satisfied himself as to our credentials.

We were now able to enter Hungarian territory and to interview the authorities of Apatfalva.

Here also I had had previous dealings with the customs officer, and was therefore not in the least surprised to hear that that dignitary had gone off duty and presumably was slumbering. A squad of the local children was dispatched to find and arouse him, and at length he appeared, as sleepy-eyed as ever.

Yet another hour passed, during which the usual dreary business was transacted and the colonel's camera was stolen from the back of the car. It was soon evident that to reach Budapest that night was an impossibility, and we could only hope to be able to find an hotel in Szeged before it was too late to order supper. Fortunately for the traveller, the times of meals on the continent are very flexible, and there is no counterpart, thank goodness, to that typically British institution, D.O.R.A. Thus we were able to end an irritating day in a convivial manner, and to congratulate ourselves at least on having left the Balkan States behind us.

CHAPTER XVI

THE HOMEWARD RUN (*continued*)

THROUGH CENTRAL EUROPE, AND DOWN THE VALLEY OF THE RHINE

FROM Szeged to Budapest is an easy run, and the road is fairly good. To us, fresh from the rutted tracks of the Balkans, it appeared magnificent, and our spirits rose proportionately with our average speed. We were, of course, a day behind our schedule in reaching the Hungarian capital, but conditions ahead of us we knew to be improving, and Miranda, although some remnants of Grecian dust in the carburettor made her cough occasionally, seemed to have suffered little from the strenuous service that had been demanded of her.

From Budapest to Vienna, and from Vienna to Prague, we travelled within the space of two consecutive days, sleeping each night in a different country. Prague was not actually on our direct route to England, but I retained such pleasant memories of my previous visit to that city—one half of it so gaily modern and the other so venerable and picturesque—that I voted strongly

in favour of the detour. We were rewarded by a thoroughly amusing evening.

It was only appropriate, both the colonel and I being devotees of that plebeian but admirable beverage, that we should have stopped for lunch the next day at Pilsen, where the beer is brewed. Very excellent we found it, quaffed amid its native haunts. I yield to no man in my respect for the good English ale, but in a warm climate there is much to be said in favour of the lighter Czecho-Slovakian brew, which, by the way, is always served stone cold.

We had no difficulty in entering Germany that afternoon, the customs officials being as helpful and courteous as they were efficient. What a contrast to the unfriendly reception which the traveller encounters on many of the Balkan frontiers! Apparently it is only the minor states of Europe which find it necessary to hedge themselves about with irritating restrictions, to employ a small army of soldiers and civil servants for the purpose of pestering their infrequent visitors, and to entrench themselves behind a river of ink and a mountain of printed forms and ledgers.

We slept at Nuremberg, and the following day took a north-westerly route through Wurzburg and Frankfurt to Wiesbaden. Just outside the latter town we saw what appeared to be a familiar uniform, and, on closer inspection, found that the wearer was a British soldier! Wiesbaden, formerly famous as a spa, is now the

headquarters of the Army of Occupation. It is, I think, highly creditable to the Germans that this was our first visible reminder that we were driving through an ex-enemy country.

We had leisure during the evening to observe the effect produced upon the civilian population by the presence of our troops. I saw one old man openly scowling at the representatives of a foreign power who strolled so confidently through the streets, but, on the whole, feelings of bitterness seemed to be almost entirely absent. The situation was being accepted with as good a grace as patriotism would permit.

The inhabitants of Wiesbaden, I fancy, have little enough cause to complain of their uninvited guests. I have never before or since seen the spirit of the British army displayed to such complete advantage. The bearing of the men compelled one's admiration, for they carried themselves with an assurance that held no hint of arrogance.

The French forces, which are also quartered in this district, are inclined to make their presence more acutely felt. So, at least, we inferred from the conversation of individual Germans. It is, in fact, only a slight exaggeration of the facts to describe the general public, which is very definitely anti-French, as being, by contrast, almost pro-British in its sentiments.

Our next stopping place beyond Wiesbaden was Cologne, or, as the Germans call it, Köln.

Joining the Rhine valley almost at once, we chose the road which passes through Neuwied, but avoids the manufacturing city of Coblenz. Although puny in comparison with the Danube, the Rhine is a fine river and easily the more attractive of the two. Both rise in the same region, but, while the former flows sluggishly across the vast plains of Central Europe, the latter winds hither and thither between the densely wooded slopes of Western Germany.

Cologne is an interesting place, and has a character of its own. Unlike most of the big German cities, it retains its old-fashioned narrow streets, and in this respect compares unfavourably with the average provincial town in England. The motorist, in consequence, is at a disadvantage, but careful thought has been given to the convenience of the pedestrian. " One-way traffic " is the rule for the pavements of busy thoroughfares, and the notice " Walk on the right " hangs above the middle of the roadway.

Being unprepared for this, our first excursion on foot to the shopping centres was something of an ordeal. We were butted and jostled by hurrying figures whose " right of way " we had unwittingly obstructed, and, very naturally, received a scowl or muttered imprecation where we had looked for an apology. Once learned, however, we found the " one-way " system admirable, and were soon stepping out at a pace which would otherwise have been impossible.

Cologne's chief landmark is its cathedral, a magnificent Gothic structure standing in an open square. The fact that it must be viewed from a point almost directly below it causes its twin spires, which are actually over 500 feet high, to tower apparently to an even more colossal height. When its bells peal out from such an eminence, the whole city must hear and listen.

My own most vivid impression of our brief stay concerns these bells. I was in my bedroom when I first heard them, and for some time, such is their depth and power, imagined that I was listening to the notes of an organ played in some distant part of the hotel!

We continued to follow the Rhine valley northward from Cologne, travelling over roads that are tarred in the English fashion, and as smooth as any in Europe. German roads, on the whole, are not particularly good, being exceedingly dusty and having a very variable surface; but in the Rhineland, the chief industrial area of the country, it is possible to indulge in high speeds without any of the usual discomforts. In a surprisingly short space of time we had passed through Krefeld and Duisburg, and were heading for the Dutch frontier.

We lunched at Kleve, or Cleves, the little town from which the Princess Anne came to play the arduous rôle of one of Henry VIII's many wives. Hers must have been a trying reception when she first met her Royal suitor, although

she ultimately fared better than some of that monarch's unsuccessful consorts. Disappointed by the homeliness of her appearance, and furious at the duplicity of those courtiers whose panegyrics had caused him to commit himself, "bluff King Hal" is said to have alluded to her, with unpardonable bluffness, as "that Flemish mare!"

The modern Kleve is an attractive place, set on a hill overlooking one of the tributaries of the Rhine. Holland and Germany meet just beyond its boundaries, so that it was still early in the afternoon when the Dutch sentries stopped us. The examination of our papers did not take long, and we were soon passing through familiar scenes—a country of billiard-table flatness, neat little houses, fertile bulb fields, and canals.

Holland always impresses me with a sense of peace and comfortable security. It seems almost unthinkable that fierce passions and violent emotions could lurk behind the trim Venetian blinds of those well-ordered villas which stand, spick and span as a new pin, each among the flower beds of its own devoutly tended plot of ground. Certainly the Dutch have the air of a pacific and contented race, although history has proved them no weaklings in the art of war.

In Arnheim we took a westward turning, and reached Utrecht with an hour of daylight still in hand. At the latter town we had intended to spend the night, but the good roads and

obliging customs officials had enabled us to maintain such a good pace that we decided to push on to The Hague. Conditions continued to favour us, and we were in the Dutch capital in time for dinner.

Having thus got well ahead of the time-table we had previously arranged, we were able to spend an entire day at leisure, our boat from the Hook not being due to leave until the following midnight. The colonel had friends at The Hague, and the weather was glorious, so that our first spell of laziness since leaving Constantinople was passed in congenial company and amid ideal surroundings.

I hardly know whether we were glad or sorry to think that our long trek had come at last to an end. Personally, I had been at the wheel, on and off, for almost exactly two months, and the business of driving, during the greater part of that time, had been far from easy. I doubt if I could ever really grow tired of motoring, but eight thousand miles of continental road work is undeniably something of a strain. I am guilty of no exaggeration when I say that twenty miles in Poland or Macedonia is the equivalent of a hundred miles in England.

Similarly, although the free and easy life of a mechanical nomad in those wild but lovely mountainous countries which we call the Balkans is one that must ever appeal to the restless spirit of adventure, it would be folly to underrate

the value of the English (or flealess) bed as a fitting climax to a long and tiring day. Roast beef may be a poor substitute for romance, yet there comes a time when the true patriot, exiled willingly or of necessity to foreign lands, yearns secretly for the homely fragrance of his Sunday joint.

Our homeward voyage across the North Sea proved uneventful, and, having stayed late on deck to see the last shadows of the Dutch coastline fade into the darkness, I slept with unwonted soundness. I could not immediately identify my surroundings when I awoke, and remained for some moments rubbing my eyes and peering vaguely around the cabin. Then, through the porthole, I caught a glimpse of a grey landscape wrapped in fog—of rain that fell steadily from a leaden sky. An aroma of eggs and bacon stole gently, almost timidly, to my nostrils. I arose; I coughed once or twice; I sneezed. It was enough.

CONCLUSION

In writing "finis" to this, my first attempted contribution to contemporary literature, I am encouraged by one comforting reflection. That is, that I cannot be accused of having misled the public as to the intention and scope of a work that has been justly criticised as "slender." I indicated in my foreword that I contemplated no startling addition to the store of human knowledge concerning Central Europe and the Balkans, and my bitterest detractor must admit that I have kept my word.

My reasons for imposing upon myself this curious form of self-denial were, I still consider, eminently sound. The first, and most important, was that I had no political or other information of moment to impart. The second, which, in the circumstances, hardly mattered, was that I seriously doubted my ability to be instructive without being tedious—edifying without being dull.

In the event, however, of some pertinacious person studying this book from end to end, I shall be profoundly conscious of my indebtedness to his or her determination. That debt I shall endeavour to repay. In an idle moment

I once jotted down as they occurred to me the Ten Commandments most vital to the Balkan wayfarer, and one of these, the substance of which I still recall, may conceivably be of value to those who contemplate an expedition similar to my own.

> "THOU shalt not fail to take with thee thy sense of humour. In like manner as thy tooth-brush is numbered ever among the contents of thy baggage, so let thine appreciation of the ridiculous accompany thee whithersoever thou goest in the Balkan lands."

Here, at least, is a precept of immediate and practical utility. There is no substitute for a sense of humour, and those in whom this quality is lacking or only partially developed would be well advised to turn back or take a train from Bucharest. Courage and resolution will triumph over the majority of serious hardships, but the minor annoyances and inconveniences, a few representative examples of which I have recorded, can only be banished with a smile.

Balkan officialdom, in particular, should never be taken altogether seriously. The English traveller has, in the course of centuries, acquired the enviable reputation of being a genial, but undiluted, imbecile. This reputation, at all costs, must be upheld. It is his surest shield against the suspicions and misunderstandings

that his insular peculiarities would otherwise infallibly arouse.

Finally, the successful Balkan traveller must be a persistent optimist, ever convinced that, just beyond the mountains that encompass him, the fleas will throng his bed less thickly, the wine will be less poisonous, and the road less reminiscent of a war-time devastated area, It is perhaps, in some such spirit that I venture to pass for publication the final proofs of "YOUTH GOES EAST."

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