

A New Playground in Eastern Europe

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THOUGH the coast of Istria and Dalmatia has become tolerably familiar to travellers during the last few years, the countries which lie behind the strong chain of the Dinaric Alps are still practically a *terra incognita*. Bosnia and Herzegovina, the two Turkish provinces which, since 1878, have been in the occupation of Austria, are inhabited by a Slav race, though the upper classes are the strictest of Mahomedans. These Bosnian Begs and Agas, strange as it may seem, are the descendants of a Christian sect, locally known as Bogomiles, who were so unmercifully persecuted under the last Catholic kings of the country that when Mahommed II. invaded Europe in the fifteenth century they embraced the Moslem religion in a body. The terrible misgovernment of the country in more recent times, the stern rule of Omar Pasha and the revolts of the Christians are too well known to be recapitulated. The task of restoring order which the Austrians have had has been no light one; but, thanks mainly to the sagacity and skill of Herr von Kallay, the Minister entrusted with the management of the occupied provinces, the result already achieved has been remarkable. Roads and railways are daily being extended, municipal institutions—in which the different creeds are proportionately represented—have been established in the chief towns, a system of government-loans to the peasants has been established, government hotels have been built at the most interesting centres, a strong body of gendarmery has rendered brigandage almost a thing of the past, the local art-industries have been encouraged by government schools at Sarajevo, Foca, and Livno, and in Herzegovina the culture of the vine and the tobacco-plant seems likely to have an important influence upon the revenue. The valuable mines and immense stores of timber to be found in the forests are only beginning to be exploited; in these, as in the breeding of cattle, there can be no doubt that a source of great wealth lies before the country.

There are two main routes by which Bosnia and Herzegovina can be entered. The nearest for tourists from the north of Europe is the line of railway which enters the country at Brod, on the Save, and ascends the valley of the Bosna to Sarajevo, the capital. This is the direct route from Vienna and Buda-Pesth, but English travellers will more probably prefer to combine their journey with a trip down the Dalmatian coast, in which case they will have the advantage of travelling by the luxurious Austrian Lloyd or Hungarian-Croat steamers as far as Metkovic, at the mouth of the Narenta, which is connected by railway with Mostar, the capital of Herzegovina. The delta of the Narenta has the unenviable reputation of being the most fever-stricken district of Europe, and though its sanitary condition has been improved by the embankments raised by the Austrian Government, travellers will do well not to stop at Metkovic, but to hurry on to Mostar, which is but two or three hours' distant. Mostar, though a poor town in itself, is extremely interesting owing to its thorough Oriental character. It is situated in a narrow defile, where the Narenta forces its way between steep cliffs which leave room for barely more than a long street on either bank of the river. The two quarters of the town thus formed are joined by one of the most beautiful bridges in the world, a structure



MOSTAR, HERZEGOVINA: THE BRIDGE OVER THE NARENTA

which spans the stream, at a height of seventy feet, by a single arch, so steep and light in appearance as to appear unsafe, though it has existed so long that its origin is lost in remote antiquity. Apart from this famous bridge there is no building in Mostar of any architectural beauty, though the town abounds with picturesque corners and groups to tempt an artist. Here, as throughout Herzegovina, the houses are built of stone, with flat roofs and overhanging windows in the upper storeys, the ground-floor consisting of blank walls pierced by wide doorways ornamented with graceful metal-handles. The mosques are for the most part plain and destitute of ornament, though in a few of them the windows are filled with stone-slabs pierced with perforations curiously like those in the beautiful Roman amphitheatre at Pola. Though the mountains which hem in the town are as bare and stony as those along the coast from Zara to Ragusa, the valleys which expand to the east and west are extremely fertile, and the luxuriant vegetation bears witness to the close proximity of the Adriatic. Vines, figs, tobacco, maize and pomegranates flourish wherever there is sufficient soil, and the wine grown in the neighbourhood is peculiarly sweet and strong. A few miles below Mostar, at Blagaj, where the road to Nevesinje and the Montenegrin frontier begins to climb the steep uplands, may be seen one of those natural phenomena which are a characteristic of the country. At the foot of a gigantic cliff, crowned with the ruins of Stepanograd, the castle of the last Duke of Herzegovina, is a deep cavern, the haunt of innumerable pigeons, from the recesses of which springs the Bosna—a no trickling stream, but a full-grown river, too deep to be formed from its very birth. Like the Kerka, near Knin, the Bosna at Ilidze, and the Ombla near Ragusa, the Bosna is supposed to be the outlet of an underground stream which has been swallowed up in the porous limestone rock. Close to the cavern from which it emerges are the ruins of a small mosque which has been destroyed by the rocks that have fallen from the cliff above, and even nearer the cliff and the edge of the water is the shrine of a local saint, whose carpet-covered tomb and war-club are shown by the keeper of the shrine—grave and courteous Mahomedan, who entertains travellers with hospitality in a little verandah built out over the deep clear stream. From Mostar, a day's journey by the recently finished railway, leads through the splendid rocky gorges of the Narenta to Sarajevo, situated at the further end of the fertile Sarajevsko Polje. The line, which is constructed with an extremely narrow gauge, passes through some of the most romantic

scenery south of the Danube. At Jablanica, where the gigantic mass of the Prenj, with its snow-streaked rocks, is in full view, an excellent hotel has been opened, and a line of diligences leads northwards, through the valleys of the Rama and the Verbas, to Jaice. Jablanica is a convenient centre for exploring the chain which separates Bosnia from Herzegovina. Both here and further on, at Konjica, the Narenta, and its tributary streams abound with fish, while the mountains are the haunt of bears and wolves. This district, free from the scorching heat of the mountains on the Dalmatian coast, has boundless possibilities as a summer-resort, and its charm is not lessened by the fact that much of it has been barely explored. Between Konjica and Sarajevo the railway crosses the steep ridge of the Ivan Planina, which here forms the watershed between the Adriatic and the Black Sea. The line is carried over the mountain by a series of bold curves, in the ascent and descent of which a system of cog-wheels is employed, something similar to that in use on the Rigi railway. The summit is crowned by a thick forest of beech and pine—a sign that the limestone region of

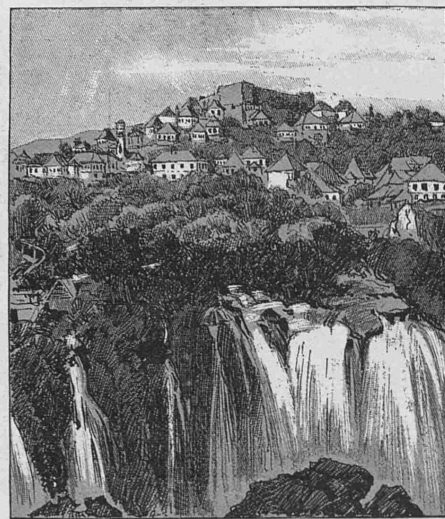


THE STREET OF THE TINSMITHS, SARAJEVO

Herzegovina has been left behind, and the older geological formation prevailing in the northern part of Bosnia has been reached. The houses with their steep roofs, covered with wooden shingles, are in marked contrast to the more southern architecture of Mostar. The vine and the fig are no longer met with, but vast meadows remind the traveller more of parts of Switzerland—to which country, indeed, Bosnia bears no slight resemblance.

It would require the art of a word-painter of the first rank to do justice to the beauty of Sarajevo and its surroundings. Hemmed in on three sides by steep hills, the "Damasus of the North," as it has been called, stretches with its hundred mosques and their graceful minarets on both sides of the river Miljacka, which here issues in a sudden bend from a rocky gorge. The town is dominated by the citadel, within whose walls is hidden a quiet quarter, with mosques and minarets, narrow streets and gardens. Unlike many Oriental towns, Sarajevo does not prove disappointing on closer acquaintance. The houses stretch far up the sides of the mountains which surround it; almost every house has its garden bright with fruit-trees and shaded by giant poplars; at every turn in the winding lanes fresh glimpses are obtained of delicate minarets and rounded domes, while a noble background to the whole is formed by the bold outlines of the pine-covered Trebevic and the surrounding ranges. The centre of the town presents a curious mixture of Eastern characteristics and Viennese elegance. Shops, hotels, and Government buildings jostle one-storeyed booths and ancient mosques. Everything shows signs of the change which has come over the country during late years; and if the result is not altogether harmonious, the traveller can plunge into the bazaar and the Carsia, or business quarter, where he will find the surroundings as Oriental as at Damascus or Cairo. The potters' stalls, with their delicate cream-coloured ware, decorated in dark red; the leather merchants, where are made those wonderful red belts in which a Bosniac carries all his worldly possessions; the weavers, working with their feet as much as with their hands; the coppersmiths, who make the elegant vessels which are in common use all over the country; the tinmiths, who decorate the copper jugs and basins by tinning them over, and then cutting away the surface in beautiful designs, leaving the original copper showing underneath—these and a hundred other industries have all their separate streets of low booths, in which the owners sit cross-legged, barely raised a foot from the ground. At every corner is a mosque, with its desolate graveyard full of turban-crowned headstones, its minaret, sometimes of stone, but oftener of weather-stained wood, and its domed fountain, where the faithful may be seen performing their ablutions with all the strictness of a religion which, more than any other, teaches that "cleanliness is next to godliness." Sarajevo is a convenient headquarters for numberless interesting excursions, and no one should omit a visit to the Franciscan Monastery of Sutjeska—a few hours' walk from the station of Catici, on the Brod line—the oldest, if not the largest, of the monasteries which have preserved the Catholic faith in a Mahomedan country from the 13th century. Sutjeska is full of memories of the last Bosnian kings. One of these, Thomas Stefan (d. 1461), lies buried in its church, and a few miles distant are the ruins of the Royal castle of Bobovac, while the picturesque hills and valleys which surround the monastery are sprinkled with the moss-grown tombs of the persecuted Bogomiles. A little farther down the Bosna Valley is the station whence the diligences run to the old capital of Travnik. Here, again, though on a lesser scale than at Sarajevo, the town has an Oriental character peculiarly its own. Travnik, built in a narrow valley at the foot of an old castle, represents the Turkish element in Bosnia, in contradistinction to Sarajevo, which was the seat of the powerful native nobles. Here used to be the residence of the Viziers sent from Constantinople, and in the winding streets of the town may still be seen their tombs, covered with ornamental domes and arches. The mosques have a character of their own. They are generally decorated outside with rather primitive paintings, sometimes of landscapes, but oftener of single trees. The principal mosque

in particular is peculiarly picturesque, owing to its being entirely surrounded on the ground floor by the shops of the bazaar. From Travnik a beautiful drive leads over the Komar mountain, by Dolnji Vakuf, and the lovely wooded valley of the Verbas, to Jaice, the most picturesquely situated town in a country more than usually rich in fine scenery. In a deep trough which the river has cut for itself in the tufa rock the Verb s rushes towards the east; at right angles to it, immediately below the town, the Pliva, descending from a chain



JAICE: THE FALLS OF THE PLIVA

of lakes to the north, forms a series of gigantic falls, some 100 feet high, down to the bed of the Verbas. The scene is one which rivals Tivoli and Terni in beauty, while in volume of water the falls of the Pliva are second only to the falls of the Rhine at Schaffhausen. Immediately above the falls the town is piled up the side of a steep hill, on the summit of which is the castle which was the last stronghold of Stefan Thomašević (d. 1463), the last king of Bosnia. From the castle the remains of walls, with strong towers and deep-arched gates, descend on each side of the town to the gorge in which the river flows, while on one side of the hill rises the graceful campanile of the ruined church of St. Luke, built by Italian architects for Stefan's wife, Queen Mara. A little above the church are the extremely curious catacombs which formed—according to the latest theory of antiquaries—the burial-place of the families of Hrvoje and Krestic, from whom sprang the short-lived royal dynasty of Bosnia.

In the first weeks of October Jaice is the scene of a three days' fair, to which the peasants from miles round bring their cattle and horses. The little half-ruined town is then crowded with figures in every possible form of picturesque costume, and no better opportunity can be obtained of studying the splendid types of the South Slavonic race. At night, when the meadow where the fair is held is lighted up by innumerable fires and the sound of the strangely beautiful national songs, accompanied by the violin and the *tamburica*—a sort of long-necked mandoline—is heard from every garden and booth, the scene is one which will not soon be forgotten by those who are fortunate enough to have witnessed it.

A visit to Jaice is a fitting climax to a tour in Bosnia. The return journey can be made either by the diligence which runs to Jablanica, on the Mostar railway, or by carriage or military post to Banialuka, a large and picturesque town, connected by railway with Agram, in Croatia. If the latter route is chosen, a night must be spent on the road at the little town of Varcar Vakuf. The only inn here is decidedly primitive; but the traveller will find clean accommodation and a hospitable welcome at the barracks of the gendarmery, who throughout the country are always ready to give every assistance to tourists. In remote districts like this their help is often indispensable, for the gendarmes are frequently the only guides to be obtained who can speak German, and it is not every traveller who can command enough Slav to make himself understood by the natives. The attention which they, in common with nearly all the Austrian officials in Bosnia, from highest to lowest, are always ready to give, deserves a special word of recognition.

Notes by the Lazy Reader.

THERE is a certain class of people who insist on detailing to the unlucky individual who writes stories lengthy narratives wholly devoid of point, or beginning, or end. "There," they say, with that infinite delight which is the sole prerogative of bores, "make that into a story, and it will be better than ninety-nine of a hundred three-volume novels." Mr. Lang once tried to drown these in a stream of gentle irony, but still they go rampantly through the world, and only comparable with them are those people the pickers up of brilliant jokes which they clamour to have sent to *Punch*. Now, it is Mr. Anstey's distinction that, while his contributions to that journal are better worth reading than those of any other contributor, he scorns the elaborate joke and the depressing witticism, but on the highways and byways of this London of ours picks up unconsidered trifles of humour, and in the light of his understanding sets them forth, and they are gems. "The Man from Blankley's and Other Sketches" (Longmans), the latest volume of his reprinted essays on human nature, except for the first piece—is on the familiar lines of "Voces Populi." It is a series of sketches—overheard conversations—at all the diverse places where people congregate to which the writer has sometimes mercifully (because he is a genial humourist) added that little legitimate touch which is the satirist's right, while at others he has set down his victim's remark with the bloom of its unconscious humour fresh upon it. It is not so much that Mr. Anstey has a keen eye and ear for what is banal or for those self-delusions of mankind which sometimes delude others as that he is a most finished worker when he has the material. He never spoils his work by the superfluous line: he very rarely descends to farce by way of broadening his effects. And, moreover, to say he is a kindly humourist means that if he were not a humourist he would be a sternly pathetic writer, for the two capacities must always run in couples. We have had too little of his serious work; yet to lament that fact were to deprecate the existence of "The Man from Blankley's" and its predecessors; and the man who deserves well of his fellow is, after all, he who can make the world laugh. Mr. Bernard Partridge's illustrations con-