

TWO —



VAGABONDS

IN THE



BALKANS

JAN AND CORA GORDON



**TWO VAGABONDS IN  
THE BALKANS** BY JAN  
AND CORA GORDON With  
Illustrations in Colour and Black and White  
by the Authors

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## CHAPTER X

### MOSTAR

SINCE Petko Morič,\* burglar and comitaj, told us the history of his life Mostar has always loomed in my mind as one of the most romantic towns of Europe. It was in Mostar that Stoyan Kovachovič was imprisoned with a freebooter named Yovan whom Petko knew, and this was how Yovan told to Petko the story of their escape.

"You know Mostar? No—well, we were imprisoned in the round tower which stands at the end of the great bridge built by Rade Najmar over the Neretva River, four hundred feet in one single span—a great bridge—but we are not talking of bridges, I know. There were seven of us in one room—Stoyan Kovachovič, Vasa Bratic, a big Albanian, very strong, three others, and myself. There were great iron posts in the ground, and to these we were chained by fetters with collars on our necks and a ring around the left ankle. Oh, they were taking no risks, were the Turks. All the time Yovan was cursing because of the death of Petko. All day long he was saying what he would do to the Turks when he got out, though little chance did there seem that any would get away. Well, brothers, one day a Turkish woman came bearing food for the Albanian—the Turks, of course, searched everything and let her pass. When she had gone the Albanian began to eat the loaf and nearly broke his teeth on a file, for there were three strong files baked into the loaf.

\* Pr. Moritch.



MOSTAR



And as the Turks didn't break open the loaf, you understand, so we got them. This was two days before we were going to be shot. Stoyan, Vasa, and the Albanian filed their chains off, and it being about one hour before the '*Yatzia*' (locking up time), they called out for the gaolers. Two came, and as they entered, the Albanian—God, brothers, he was strong; his grip—he could tear the throat right out of a man, I tell you—and he gripped each—in twenty seconds they were as dead as rats—just like that. Well, Bratic went down then and got a pair of axes, and with those and the gaolers' weapons they killed ten men—all the Turks in the tower. And then they unlocked us and all the others; there were fourteen altogether. Of course, nobody outside of the tower knew anything—there had been no shooting. Suddenly we burst from the gate, and ran over the bridge. When we reached the streets we grabbed iron rods from the counters of the shops and struck our way through the crowds. They fled, I can tell you. The gendarmes came after us, and the soldiers too. But the Governor had forbidden them to shoot; said we must be caught alive. I often wonder if he had been bribed by Prince Nicholas or no. Anyhow, eight of us, including Stoyan, Vasa, and myself got clear away. We were pursued all the time, and for three days got no food at all; but at last, having shaken off the police and soldiers, we caught and killed a goat. *Bogami*, he was good. On the fourth day we came into Montenegro."

Now that I ponder over it, I am not sure that I have not found the reason which brought *me* back to Serbian countries. I remember that this story impressed me when Petko Morić told it to us in 1915. I remember that at the time I felt a strange longing to see Rade Najmar's bridge, and the tower in which Stoyan and old Yovan were imprisoned, and the streets through which they ran, beating down the people with

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iron rods. Why I felt this desire so keenly, I don't know. It had subsided in me, and become forgotten, but now I am sure that subconsciously it persisted. If a psycho-analyst had said Serbia, I might possibly have answered Mostar.

It stands just as Petko Morić tells it—there is the round tower and the battlements over which they used to throw the comitaji into the river; there is the peaked bridge springing from tower to tower—the Roman bridge, they call it in Mostar; there are the streets through which the fugitives fled into the barren mountains; there even are the ironmongers' shops, with rods, bars, and straps of metal of which to improvise weapons. Yet I was a fool to go to Mostar. The imaginative man must *not* go to places of which he has dreamed. We found Sarajevo unexpectedly, it was delight. I had imagined a Mostar, it was disappointment. Yovan's tower had shrunk, the bridge, though fine, was no dream bridge, the bazaar was less interesting by a half than that of Sarajevo. The most wonderful thing was that part which had not been dandled by the fancy, the bleak mountain desert or rocks through which the fugitives had to escape.

Beyond a little nucleus of a few acres which still exists, Mostar is as dreary a town as may be imagined. It is like a *nouveau riche* woman dressed in rather vulgar but practical tweeds decorated at the throat with an exquisite old jewel of incised metal. Mostar stretches its length along a fine rocky torrent of a river, but fully a half of its streets are of large modern commercial buildings, and the only part of any interest whatever is that small bazaar which clusters about the bridge. Mostar is a city of flats roofed with red tiles; and under the strong sun it has a dusty appearance, not that appropriate dustiness which covers a Spanish village with a natural bloom like that upon a plum, but the dustiness which we dislike upon a mantelpiece.

The manager of the bank was a brother-in-law of Nikola, so to him we went with an introduction from the student. He was a pleasant man, who offered us a variation on water-falls as centres of interest.

"Mostar," he exclaimed. "Oh yes! we have things of real interest here. The electric-light works must, of course, be seen; then we have a factory of small brass articles, coffee boilers, trays, and so on, quite a promising young industry. There is the soap works, and a public bath house, both of which we are very proud of, I assure you."

Here was one of the preachers of our future religion. In the old days we directed the steps of our visitors to the church, we pointed to glass, to sculpture, to architecture, all designed to enhance the religious instinct; to-day we send him first of all to the factory, we ask him to admire a brass tray, or a bar of soap, we make him bow down before a chaos of cogs. Omar landed the grape,

The grape that can with logic absolute  
The two-and-seventy jarring sects confute.

But for how many centuries has the grape striven in vain? In Konjic wine proves to make the sects jar more vigorously. No, it is not the getting drunk with a man that will tend to cure differences; but the making of money by, with or from him. The strongest argument against future wars is not humanitarian, but the confusion which one war has caused in the financial world.

And here and in Sarajevo we can watch the effects of Western influence upon the religion of Mahomet. Here is a sort of Land's End of Orientalism swept upon three sides by the Atlantic of European civilization. It is curious from several aspects. It is curious to note that the Christian of one sect often appears to respect the Mohammedan more than he does his fellow Christian of a differing creed, although



all, Moslems, Catholics, and Orthodox, are of the same racial stock, and few of the Moslem inhabitants of Bosnia and Herzegovina can repeat more Arabic than the confession of faith. But more interesting is it to note that Mohammedanism, which can resist so easily the missionary, is weakened by the factory and the tweed suit. As soon as the Mohammedan puts on a golf cap the essential part of his religion becomes less insistent: he has hidden his eyes from Allah. The religion of conquest, of female seclusion, of a lascivious heaven, etc., becomes merged into the religion of football, of commerce, of scepticism, and of the *cold* bath. To-day there is a certain amount of inter-marriage, especially of Mohammedan men with Catholic women; the men find it less of a nuisance socially, if their wives do not have to lurk in inner rooms; it leaves more space about the house. With Scepticism, Christianity and Mohammedanism fall into one creed, the "Get on or get out"—with the factory as church, the steam-hammer as altar piece, and the iron furnace as burnt offering. The Roman Empire weakened all religions so that a way could be prepared for Christianity; is the new empire of the machine again weakening belief in every direction for a new and more universal synthesis of man's religious instincts?

We intimated plainly to the bank director that factories had lost their interest, so he rebounded on to waterfalls; but as one of them, Vrlo Buna, promised a good restaurant and trout, as at Vrlo Bosna, we decided to walk thither, for by this time the bad food had made Jo ill. In spite of her seediness, however, we promised ourselves a few days' sketching around the old bridge of Mostar; for were we not bound for the Dalmatian islands, where with fish and oil galore we could spend one happy month amongst the simple fisherfolk?

So on or about the third day of our visit we set off early in the morning. Sava Gutić,\* the proprietor of the "Serbian Volunteer," had given us a message to a friend who would supply us with everything we could desire for lunch. The way was flat and uninteresting, for Mostar lies at one end of a narrow basin some eight miles long, Vrlo Buna being at the other, so that the whole walk was confined within the basin, and the outline of the hills changed very slowly. The flats were now green with autumn dampness, but immediately they rose from the level the herbage gave way to gaunt slopes of grey, pallid rock which had little interest or dignity. As we went we could see the effects of the phylloxera disease in the vines. There were fields of withered stumps, others had been allowed to grow deep in grass, in others were gangs of workmen rooting up stumps; and in one property, overseen by a young woman with a camp stool, was an ordered line of diggers constructing deep drains across a blasted vineyard. The grapes here are of the low stumpy variety, and the best wine is of two kinds, a white wine called Žilabka,† not unlike white Bordeaux, and a ruby red not unlike a medium flavoured Chianti, both, however, strong in alcohol: indeed the local drinkers were complaining that owing to the weakening of the vines the wines were losing their potency and were becoming undrinkable. ‡ Our opinion is that they would be improved by still further de-alcoholization.

On the road, too, we tested our previous estimate of the veiling range of the European eye. In the distance we espied a young Moslem mother with nurse and basinet approaching. Her veil was up and we waited for it to come down; we then noted the spot and paced out the carry: it was eighty-four yards.

\* Pr. Gootich.

† Ž, pr. Zh.

The village of Vrlo Buna was perched on the hillside, a long street of small shanties, which looked as if crushed beneath the weight of their ponderous roofs of veritable paving stones laid diagonally. On the road there had been few houses, and one or two bodegas or vineyard farms ; but in every case the houses had these heavy roofs, sometimes additionally weighted by large boulders. Herzegovina is already south of the snow line, which drawn across Europe definitely separates the north from the south, but for all that the Balkans lie under the lee of the Russian Steppes and the Oral Mountains.

You can scarcely talk with a Herzegovinian—especially with an inhabitant of Mostar—for ten minutes upon casual subjects but he says with a shudder, and an artificial chatter of the teeth, growing almost blue fingered at the very imagination which rises in his mind :

“ Ugh ! Yes, it’s a nice climate. But there is the *borra*.”

This *borra* is the Russian wind ; it comes with the full majesty of a clear and biting frost, howling and hooting through Mostar valley, which is shaped like a trumpet in order to give it the most effect ; Mostar valley is indeed the *borra*’s megaphone. Vrlo Buna village looks as if it was crouched in order to avoid the *borra* ; it looks as if it were indifferent enough to heat, but terrified of cold. It has the effect of a poetic rhetorical negative which often gives the reverse impression of what is written. If one exclaims rhetorically :

“ It was not night, but day,”

so much emphasis is laid upon the night that an impression of night is left in the memory, the statement is self-destroyed in trying for strength, the contrast kills the affirmative. So these stone villages seem to be saying :

“ It is not cold, but hot,”

stressing so much on the negative that one is forced to picture with a shudder how terrible would be a chill wind in so cheerless a spot. We have noted a similar impression in certain villages of Spain. Only too vividly can one imagine the discomfort of Vrlo Buna as the *borra* comes bursting down upon it through the whole length of Mostar valley, gripping at the paving stones of the roofs with such force that boulders are needed to keep them down. But doesn't any over-emphasis seem to lead to a negative; a fortress does not really exhibit dauntless courage, but fear; the growing weight of our dreadnoughts proves the measure of our timidity.

Behind the village at a distance of about a kilometre rises a face of cliffs, topped by an old robber castle. At the base of this cliff out of a cave flows a cold deep river from the depths of the earth. It comes smoothly into the light of day and is at once harnessed by man; within a few paces of the cliff's edge there is a weir, and mills, the low white buildings of which turn the river into work. Hanging at the edge of the cliff a Turk has built his house, and as it was autumn the whole façade was decorated with necklaces of tobacco leaves strung along their ropes like tigers' teeth. The approach to this house is through the ruins of a disembowelled mosque. We wonder how many successive temples have stood upon that impressive site.

We returned to the village to look for the friend of Sava Gutič. He was the owner of the largest shop of the village, a man of sixty years, grey haired with eyebrows and moustache of grey bristles which rivalled one another in luxuriance, between which sprouted out a formidable nose: a man of character. He was dressed in Herzegovinian peasant costume, which much resembles that of Montenegro—small flat pork-pie hat, loose white shirt covered with a waistcoat





decorated with brass ornaments, baggy blue knee breeches full in the seat and finished with red at the waist, and white felt leggings (always cut as if for a man with fat legs and huge calves) decorated with red embroidery.

We introduced ourselves, and said that Sava had sent us to him. He welcomed us, and we ordered a glass of wine apiece. He banged the glasses down, saying that the wine was of his own growing, and that we would not get better in Herzegovina. Žilabka wine it was, and excellent. Then we asked for lunch.

His expression changed. He scratched his head.

"*Bogami*," said he, "you could have had lunch last month. But do you see, it's no longer the season for visitors."

"But have you nothing?" we exclaimed with dismay, for we were hungry after our eight miles.

"Nothing, nothing," said the man, spreading out his hands. "And can't get anything either."

Meanwhile Jo had realized that this old fellow was very like a near relative, and, knowing that this relative hid an accessible heart behind a resolute exterior, she determined to test a fact which we have often held, that often similar appearances hide similar characteristics. So she began deliberately to act upon this old man as she would have done upon her own kinsman, and in a short while we saw pity fusing the inflexibility of his eye. He was three-quarters won when his wife came in, and by further eloquence of the wretchedness of our plight we melted them both together. The old man went to the door.

"Miloš," \* he called out.

Miloš is a man's name, but a little girl appeared.

"Go to the school and see if the master has eggs," said the host.

"How many eggs?"

"Oh, half a dozen. Can you eat as many?"

In ten minutes Miloš had come back.

"The schoolmaster has no eggs," she said.

"*Bogami*," said our host, "that's bad news."

An interval ensued, during which our lunch seemed to balance between the possible and the impossible. At last a dishevelled boy came in with seven eggs in his hat. We paid five dinars (3½d.) for the seven, and lunched on sour bread, eggs, and Žilabka wine. As we were eating we looked about us. This was the richest shop in the place. Its stock-in-trade consisted of a few balls of string, seven cheap glass lamps, a few packets of stationery, three or four cheap account books, scrubbing brushes, soap, and tiny Turkish coffee cups. In the counter were a series of drawers containing things such as rice, sugar, maize, flour, and a half-dozen sacks of flour lay at the back of the room. I wonder whether the profits of the shop paid for the cleaning? Yet we have heard that this man is considered very rich in the district. But here riches do not go by external evidence. We were told that in a village near by is a family so rich that they possess three thousand head of sheep. Yet they persist in their old ways to such an extent that several families sleep all together (as at Mika's), and forty persons of all ages and both sexes share one bedroom between them.

In Mostar if you offer tobacco to any one he looks at it, smells it, fingers it, and says with surprise:

"Why! it's Government tobacco."

\* Pr. Milosh.

## 202 TWO VAGABONDS IN THE BALKANS

The only acquaintance who smoked Government tobacco was Sava Gutić, and he did so because his place was liable to be raided by the police. So, wishing to be in the fashion and to avoid ill-concealed scorn, we had asked where contraband tobacco could be bought. We were told that we could get it easily.

"Oh, we'll get you any amount in five minutes. How much will you require? Six pounds, ten pounds?"

The girl Miloš was again given instructions; and in a short while returned accompanied by a young man of clerkly appearance.

"Tobacco?" said he, "surely, and of the finest quality. How much do you want? Twenty pounds, thirty pounds?"

But we were bound for Dalmatia soon, and had heard that the customs supervision was very strict. So, to the disappointment of everybody concerned we satisfied ourselves with a kilo, which was weighed out on the shopkeeper's scales. The old man twisted the tobacco in his fingers, smelt it, put it on his tongue, and said: "Good tobacco," with accents of approval. The tobacco cost about a shilling and eightpence a pound: it is cut laboriously, in secret, by hand, and I would not do the cutting alone for five times the price.

We then took coffee under the single tree, which stands in a wider space of the village street. From low-built Turkish shops and cafés the people watched us surreptitiously. There was here none of the frank congregational staring which the intrusion of strangers into a Spanish village stimulates; Moslem customs, at least, insist upon good manners, and ninety per cent. of the villagers are Mussulmans. Presently a lean ragamuffin with a dirty face and shock of tousled hair lurched up to us.

"You have been buying tobacco, I hear?" he said.

" Yes," we answered.

" Let me try it."

I offered him my pouch. He smelt it, and exclaimed :

" You have been cheated. This is rubbish. Now *I* have tobacco."

Pulling out a black lacquer tobacco-box, " Try this," he said.

We could not perceive any difference, and told him so.

" How much will you buy of it ? " he asked.

" We have enough."

" You are going to smoke that rubbish ? "

" Certainly."

He shrugged his shoulders, so, to keep him in good temper, we offered him coffee. He put his tobacco-box on the table. " At least," he said, " don't smoke that wretched stuff while I am here."

The chief interest of Mostar itself centres about the old bridge with its fringe of bazaar, and its little flour mills with white cascades which plunge over the rocks into the river. The whole character of the Mostar peasants can be gained by sitting in one of the little cafés which hang on the river's edge. The general odour was the same as that of Bosnia ; mutton still pestered us. Behind the round tower where Yovan was imprisoned the tanners were washing and stretching sheepskins, the next shop to that of the little café we most frequented was a sheep barber's, where a dexterous lad with a monstrous sharp knife sheared the dead skins which he stretched over his knee ; the peasant women carried each her distaff and spindle twisting out a thread of wool. Our café combined refreshment with barbering ; in the one half we sat sipping the thick fluid, sweetmeat rather than drink, in the other some ancient submitted to the hands



of the barber, who shaved him, without the use of lather, from the crown of the head to the point of his chin : the two occupations did not seem to us to be happily wedded.

Through the bazaar wandered the figures of old Mussulwomen, who wear what is perhaps the strangest garment now to be seen in Europe. Originally it must have been a full skirted cloak with sleeves and a high Incroyable collar ; but fashion has gradually forced the cloak upwards, so that what was once the neck band now encircles the crown of the head, the sleeves float uselessly from the region of the ears, and the veiled face is fixed in a meagre orifice contrived between what used to be the first and second buttons of the cloak. The high collar stands up above the head and pokes forward somewhat like a chimney cowl ; indeed one could well expect to see it swing about with a change of wind.

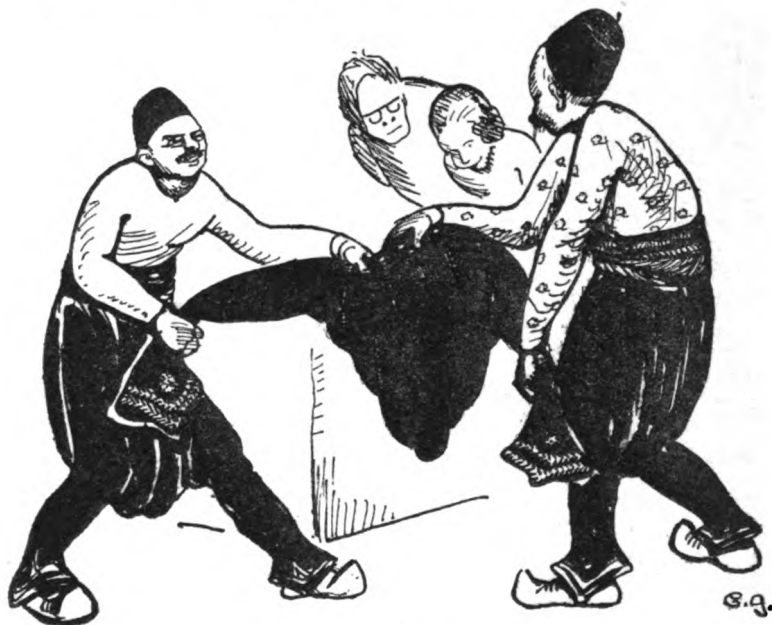
On the far side of the bridge the hill sloped so steeply up that one at once faced stairs, and by descending a dark and slippery staircase one came into a little cavernous annex of the bazaar in which dwelt the tailors and clothes merchants.

I had determined to buy a pair of full-seated Turkish trousers for use at fancy dress balls, and here we came to find the maker. A rather haughty old Turk, evidently the Poole of Mostar from his manner, passed us on to a pair of younger men who shared a dark shop which measured about ten feet square. We explained what we wanted, whereupon the one—very red faced, whether from drink or from getting wet in his fez we could not determine—exclaimed that he had exactly the thing we required, asked us to wait and ran out into the passage. While he was absent his partner amused us by showing us specimens of German paper clothing made during the war—he had also imitation silk shawls which he said were of paper ; besides these his shop contained bundles of wood fibre for scrubbing floors, and a box full of Turkish

coffee cups. Surely the origins of our large shops—Selfridges or the Army and Navy—must be sought for in the Orient.

The red-faced man returned with a basket, from which with a gesture he drew a pair of thick trousers, heavily embroidered with black applique, and lined with white linen which showed signs of some use.

“But these,” we objected, “are not new.”



Turkish Trousers.

“Not new?” exclaimed red face; “of course they aren’t. They are my very own; but I will sell them to you.”

We tempered disappointment for him by explaining that I wanted thin summer trousers, whereas these were thick winter ones. He doubted that we would find anybody who was selling his summer trousers. We replied that we would prefer a new pair, if not too expensive. Both partners

brightened up, and with the help of a small boy and an old man from the shop opposite, after a long discussion about materials, embroidery, and so on, the price was fixed at 1,300 kronen, which worked out at one pound for the exchange then ruling. They then measured me in a sketchy way and we left, with the assurance that the bags would be ready in three days' time. We use the word "bags" deliberately, for the Turk employs the seat of his trousers as a pocket for large or heavy articles.

Three days later, after sketching in the bazaar, we were sitting at our accustomed small café next to the sheep barber's, noting the amazing dexterity of the lad with his sharp knife and the watchful keenness of the owner of the skins, who was taking good care that none of his wool should be subtracted. Along the path came the shambling figure of a thin, filthy fellow, whose tawny hair hung in rat's tails from under a sheepskin cap, whose bare toes were visible through gaping boots, as though a whole litter of white mice were being swallowed by a shark. Under his arm he carried a violin, the body of which had received such hurt that it was enveloped this way and that with a network of string bandages to prevent it from automatic disintegration. With a sketched gesture he took a seat at our side, and involuntarily we remembered Dr. Johnson versus the rose. "Experience," says Bernard Shaw, "is a matter of capacity."

"Will you not play to us?" we asked him.

"Alas," replied the gipsy, "I only play old music. Nobody like you wants to hear that nowadays."

We remembered how the Spanish guitar makers say: "We only make guitars for classical music" (meaning for rag-time or two-step). Everywhere the factory is triumphing. How many centuries will ensue before a new Gibbon writes "The Decline and Fall of the Mechanical Empire"?

"But," we answered to the gipsy, "that is precisely the kind of music we desire."

There was, however, something inauspicious; the gipsy would not play. We remembered a Spanish gipsy who could only play when he was drunk; perhaps this gipsy also needed an artificial fire, *a feu d'artifice*, a torchlight procession with him, to exhilarate his ragged genius. We offered him a coffee, and he answered that he would drink rakija with us, but not coffee.

As we were talking to the gipsy the two trouser-making partners came through the bazaar, and seeing us, sat down and ordered more coffee for us. They said that the trousers would be ready in the evening. They then began to tell the gipsy things about us; but the gipsy was not going to learn anything from two tailors. He cut short all their speeches with "*Snam. Snam.*"\*

This action on the gipsy's part illustrates a characteristic which we have noticed amongst Balkan peoples. The travelling Serb student seems to be a person of open mind and eager temperament, but the stay-at-home Southern Slav is in many cases *plus chauvinist que la terre*. To begin with, the people themselves are given to exaggeration, to vauntings which have already prepared the audience for half scepticism. One must expect not to be believed, and the more courteous listener cuts off your statements before you have well begun them with this "*snam*," in order perhaps to save you the trouble of lying, and him the pain of listening to your lies.

They have a characteristic winter game of telling what purports to be a personal anecdote composed of fabrications which the audience must not be able to detect. This habit leads the simple mind further on to the conviction that everything outside of personal experience is either untrue or

\* I know. I know.



unworthy of consideration. They have a dignified way of fending off any tentative criticisms one may make. If one says: "In Europe they cook mutton without this tallow taste," the natives may reply, "Not here," with a quiet air of rectitude. Bravo, Serbia. To the next American who says to us: "We have elevators, baths and telephones in every house in America," we will reply haughtily, "Not here." But this angle of vision seems to have penetrated to places which might have known better. We have been told that when the Italians captured Trieste they found the Austrian naval regulations so excellent that they adopted them *en bloc*; whilst the Serbs, without any naval experience, finding the Austrian regulations at Pola at once destroyed the books. "Not here" indeed.

We sought for the trousers in the evening. They were excellently made, decorated with plastrons of black embroidery round the pockets, the placket hole, and the bottoms of the gaiters in which they were finished. We paid the partners, and in the darkness of their tiny shop their eyes glittered at the sight of the notes. After all I think that the tailor's complexion was due to drink, in spite of his religion: at any rate, the shop from thence on was shut during the rest of our stay in Mostar. When I tried the trousers on we found that they had paid me the most subtle compliment possible to my personal appearance. A Turk, wishing to express the heights of male physical perfection, says: "He has a waist like a stem of willow." I don't believe a Krishna would have buckled the waist belt of my new trousers about himself.

We followed our theory into every low-class restaurant of Mostar, discovering one Turkish restaurant of cleanly appearance, where we could both dine for thirteen dinars (about ninepence), which, of course, did not include wine. The best dining place was that of our friend Sáva Gutić,

the restaurant of the "Serbian Volunteer." Sava had been a carpenter and had gone to America, where he was living at the declaration of war. He had remained quietly working during the first part of the war, for he was an Austrian subject. But after the Serbian retreat through Albania in 1915, stung by some crude remark, he threw up his promising business, and volunteered in the Serbian armies. Every penny of his savings had been spent as a soldier, and when war was over he came back to his native town, intending to start work as a carpenter and to *show* them what he had learned. He associated himself with two comrades and began to make modern furniture on American designs. But local prejudice in favour both of primitive fashions and of cheap labour soon showed Sava that carpentering was going to be a losing business.

He had fallen in love with and married a young girl who had a small capital. With this, Sava, espying the lack of a good cheap restaurant in Mostar, started the "Serbian Volunteer." All the woodwork, tables, benches, counter, etc., were of his own construction, and this was the only restaurant in the Balkans in which we have seen a plate-lift. Sava had further realized that polished tables are more appetizing than coffee-stained table-cloths. His wife, being as good a cook as he was a carpenter, they were making a great success. In addition to his daily diners, he had instituted a system of subscription meals ; you paid ninety dinars (five shillings) a week to receive midday and evening meal served in your own house by a messenger boy. Doctors, lawyers, and officers were amongst his clientele, and daily one captain sent an orderly to fetch his meals. We were amused to note that militarism had so stamped this man that sometimes he stood at attention to receive his captain's dinner from Sava's hands.

A third restaurant had the attraction of naughtiness. It

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was a small affair patronized by cord porters and Turkish labourers generally. But we were led into an inner room, where we were served with some ceremony by a curly-haired girl, who, during intervals of serving, flirted with a group of Moslems at the table opposite. In and out of the room flew a continuous succession of bats. Presently one of the Turks bent downwards and came upright again grasping a little bottle in his hands. It is the custom in the Balkans to serve rakija and sometimes cognac in tiny glass bottles containing a couple of liqueur glasses or so, very awkward to drink out of. This man put the bottle to his lips, drank, and then replaced the bottle on the floor. Another had a bottle in his pocket. Gradually we realized that every drinker in this inner room, while ostensibly consuming coffee—for the table was covered with coffee apparatus—was sipping rakija from concealed bottles. We imagined that we had discovered a secret drinking station for hypocritical Mussulmans, but Sava squashed our romantic notion.



“When a Turk wan’s a drink, he drinks, you bet,” said Sava. “No, sir. Them fellers was Saturday night drinkers. Y’know it’s law here that we can’t serve spirits from Saturday afternoon till Monday morning, so’s the wife can get at least a dip into the feller’s pocket. Eh? He gotta go home with his wages, see!”

And I remembered how, when I was a working student in the Cornish mines, the miners, receiving perhaps twenty-five or thirty shillings a week, would go straight from the pay desk to the public-house, where they would remain till six or seven o’clock in the evening.