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# THE RUSSIANS ARE IN THE BALKANS

## *The Background of the Soviet's Whirlwind Penetration—*

EUROPEAN wars have been threatened and one actually fought to keep Russia out of the Balkans. But now that it has at last occurred it gets bare mention in the news. We are so interested in another advance into Germany, or another island hop in the Pacific, that we barely notice how Russian troops have entered every Balkan country.

However, who occupies and reorganises the Balkans is just as important as how Germany itself is occupied and reorganised. Europe for a whole century has been an unstable—and therefore potentially explosive—mixture of states and cultures largely because its Eastern, and particularly South-eastern, regions have been hungry, divided, discontented, and distracted, exploited as political pawns. Unless very quickly we can make them united, independent, and prosperous there will be nothing in Europe to counterbalance the strong Germany which concern for the continent's economic welfare may cause the peace-makers to create, or alternatively, nothing to absorb the unrest and disequilibrium that would radiate from a weak Germany.

But are the Balkans themselves willing to be united and enriched? And when we shortly awake to the realisation that Russia has opened a Second Front on her own account and swept up a quarter of the continent with her left hand, will traditional fears and jealousies revive and prevent a realistic settlement?

### Nobody Knows the Balkans

Nobody knows the Balkans. Out of every thousand New Zealanders visiting Europe I doubt if one goes there. Even the Europeans themselves—those in the west and centre—talk of this big peninsula of theirs as if it were a strange Asiatic or other distant country of incomprehensible feuds. Indeed it is to the misunderstanding of Balkan conditions by the Western statesmen who have been trying to settle its affairs for a century and a-half that the "balkanisation" of the Balkans is mainly due.

Come down with us from Austria, through Yugoslavia and Bulgaria, to Constantinople. The bare, crevassed wall of Karawanken, pink in the sunlight above the Alpine lake called Worther See, looks like a barrier between two civilisations. But over the snow-flecked pass Slovenia is still semi-Alpine country, the peasants much the same (even to Austrian shorts and dirndls for some miles), the churches still Roman Catholic if perhaps rather more

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by A.M.R.

(Photographs by Marjorie Richards)

bulbous-domed, the road-signs still in a legible alphabet. But as you jolt south among the folds of that offshot of the Alps that runs right through to Greece, you very shortly see—unbelievable sight in Christian Europe—a mosque! And then the typical Bosnians come to wear Turkish turbans or fezzes, pointed shoes, baggy trousers, boleros and bright striped girdles. By the time you reach Montenegro you have seen poverty too: villages that cannot put you up because every stone cottage is already chock-full of family and goats; "farms" that are scarcely larger than the floor space in your house, that are sunk among high boulder walls to keep out wild animals, and that were painfully collected, bucketful of soil by bucketful, from the rain-washings in all the rock crevices for chains around.

And then, whether you strike east for the comparative prosperity of Belgrade on the edge of the Hungarian plain, or continue south to where real mountains and real mountaineers begin in Moslem Albania, you run into the Cyrillic alphabet. Over more mountains lies Macedonia, where kilted Greeks and nomad Vlachs, "commuting" yearly from coast to mountains with tents and herds, so mingle among Albanians, Serbs, Turks, and Bulgars that every race in the peninsula claims the area. Our course, however, is for Asiatic Istanbul where we shall meet European dress again—its wearing enforced by law. But meanwhile we traversed the long wide valley of Bulgaria, watching distilleries make Attar of Roses and fragile little water-buffaloes ploughing the fields.

(continued on next page)



Village market in Yugoslavia