



SOCIAL LIFE IN BULGARIA.

By J. D. BOURCHIER.



It is interesting to watch the growth and expansion of free institutions in a newly-liberated people ; it is still more interesting to watch the gradual progress of its social development. In Bulgaria we see a nation which has been released by a single stroke of destiny from the bondage of centuries, and has slumbered through a long night of barbarism far into the morning of latter-day civilization. The Bulgarians have only just completed the first decade of their liberty. That liberty was won, not by a comparatively gradual process, as in the case of Greece, Servia, and Roumania, but as the result of a single campaign, following directly upon scenes of unutterable horror and misery. A race, which but yesterday was groaning under an alien tyranny incapable of assimilating the civilization of the West, to-day governs itself under a constitution as democratic as anything to which Western Europe has attained. This fact alone gives proof of the remarkable character of the Bulgarians. The democracy of Western Europe has grown up amid the ruins of decaying absolutism and feudalism ; the democracy of Bulgaria was born of a single great war, and entered upon its career untaught by the priceless experience of the past. A constitution founded on the most advanced liberal principles was granted to the simple *rayahs* of the Balkans by a monarch who governs absolutely in his own dominions ; that constitution could hardly have been expected to last ; probably it was not intended to last. When Prince Dondukoff Korsakoff, the Russian Governor who had framed the constitution, was leaving the country he said that the mines were already laid. But the self-control, the tenacity, and the sturdy common-sense of the Bulgarians has triumphed over every difficulty. Prince Alexander, indeed, in a moment of despair annulled the Constitution of Tirnova ; but he discovered his mistake in time, and never again departed from the lines of constitutionalism. Prince Ferdinand has firmly adhered to the spirit and letter of the constitution, and he has done wisely. At first he was disposed, like his predecessor, to follow the advice of the small band of Conservatives who represent the highest culture in Bulgaria, and whose familiarity with the results of western civilization has caused them to distrust the political capacity of their uneducated fellow-countrymen. But he has now for more than a year given his entire confidence to M. Stambouloff, a statesman sprung from the people, and an admirable representative of all the special characteristics of Bulgarian democracy. The order, the good government, and the political stability now existing in Bulgaria form a remarkable contrast to the state of affairs in the neighbouring Balkan countries, and have been the subject of eulogiums on the part of monarchs and prime ministers of great European Powers. It is worth while to glance at the social development and the domestic life of a people who have attempted the task of self-government with such remarkable success, and who have proved themselves so eminently fitted to enjoy the blessings of liberty.

It is hard at first to realize the difficulties under which the Bulgarians, during the last ten years, have undertaken the work of political and social reconstruction. In order to do so we must bear in mind that everything in Bulgaria has been at a stand-

still for five hundred years. The Bulgarian peasant tills his fields with the same kind of plough, he inhabits the same kind of house, he wears the same kind of clothing as his ancestors in the days of our Plantagenet kings; his standard of domestic comfort, of social life, and of general well-being is hardly different from what it was when he first submitted to the rule of the Ottoman Turk. But this is not all; in some points he has distinctly retrograded. The misfortunes of its history are often to blame for the faults which we recognize in the character of a nation; many of the peculiarities, for instance, which Englishmen ridicule or dislike in the Irish disposition are simply the product of ages of unsympathetic government. Centuries of subjection to an alien master have left their mark on the habits and character of the Bulgarian peasant. To-day he is free, yet he still preserves the dogged, downcast look of the oppressed *rayah*; he still buries his money, and even his winter's corn-store in the ground; he still looks with suspicion on the stranger, because in past times every stranger who came to his village came to take something from him. His experience of foreigners has not hitherto been a pleasant one: the Turk, the Greek, the Jew have vied with each other in despoiling him of the fruits of his labour; even the Russian who came as his liberator would fain have remained as his master. Hitherto he has had little experience of Englishmen; perhaps he is hardly aware how many Englishmen a dozen years ago were willing to leave him in his cruel bondage. No wonder he looks somewhat askance at foreign influence and foreign civilization. His watchword is "Bulgaria for the Bulgarians;" and he is as much opposed to the admission of foreign ideas into the region of his domestic and social life as he is to the intervention of foreigners in the affairs of his country. This unreceptive tendency of mind is looked upon by many as a fatal obstacle to Bulgarian progress; nevertheless Bulgaria is advancing at a pace which puts to shame the sister states of the Peninsula.

But this hatred of everything foreign, this narrow-mindedness, as some might call it, is not merely due to the paralyzing influence of Turkish rule, or to an unpleasant experience of foreigners. It has a deeper source in the rugged independence, the self-reliance, the firm solidity of character which differentiates the Bulgarian from his Southern Slav brethren. It is hard indeed to say how far the genuine Bulgarian—the Bulgarian of Tirnova, Elena, and Gabrova, where the best type of the race is to be found—is a Slav at all. Here, on the northern slopes of the Balkans, and generally in the central district of Northern Bulgaria, we find the Mongol features of the conquering Turanian race, which gave its name to the Slav populations it subdued, and eventually received from them its language and its religion. Here, too, we find the distinguishing traits of the Bulgarian character most manifestly apparent. There is a sturdy vigour of mind as well as of body, a practical common-sense, a tendency to look to the present and the future rather than to the past. The Southern Slavs are generally a race of dreamers; the Servian deals in romances concerning the greatness of ancient Servia; he tells you of Czar Dushan and his mighty empire, and dreams of a renewal of its bygone glories. The Bulgarian, on the other hand, never talks of his still more illustrious rulers, Czar Samuel and Czar Simeon; he seldom troubles you with the "Bulgarian Idea;" he strives for the present well-being of his country and her material progress, as the surest means whereby the ultimate union of his race may be achieved. The same vigorous spirit of independence makes him a thorough democrat; he means to manage the affairs of his country, as he manages his own affairs, in his own way. Once free, he determined that his freedom should be a reality, not a mere change of rulers. The first Bulgarian Sobranje elected under the Constitution of Tirnova contained an overwhelming Liberal majority. Every subsequent Parliament has been similarly composed, except when the elections have been unfairly tampered with. The rule of the Turks, much as it has hindered the social progress of the Bulgarians, has greatly tended to foster their democratic spirit. Communal self-government of a kind existed under the Turks; and as no Bulgarian, unless he were a Mohammedan, could rise to any position of authority, a general feeling of equality diffused itself among the members of the subject race. Again, the trammels of feudalism, which still restrict the growth of freedom in portions of Central and Western Europe, are not found to exist in Bulgaria. The Ottoman invasion swept away whatever elements of feudalism made their way into that part of the Peninsula which lies south of the Danube; the Servian nobles fell at Kossovo; only in Bosnia and Herzegovina is there any trace left of a feudal nobility, because the landowners saved themselves by becoming Mohammedans. North of the Danube, in Roumania, a land system based on feudal tenure still exists;

and nothing can be more striking than the difference between the sturdy, well-fed, independent Bulgarian or Servian peasant and his poor, spiritless, half-starved brother in Roumania. An effacement of social distinctions naturally followed under the rule of a fanatical conqueror who regarded every Christian, high and low, rich and poor, as a being beneath contempt. And so the Bulgarian, though his social and intellectual advancement had been arrested for five hundred years, found himself ready, in a measure, for democratic government when the moment of his emancipation arrived. He had always looked upon the Turk as an alien master ; among his own kith and kin

he did not recognize the existence of a social superior ; he knew nothing of those claims of birth which elsewhere entitle certain men to be rulers and judges over their brethren. Society, untouched by the feudal influence which widened the distinction between the lord and his vassal, the noble and the churl, undisturbed by the commercial activity which concentrates great fortunes in the hands of a few, went back to the primitive institutions of a pre-historic age. In Bulgaria we still have not only the village commune, but the house-community, the family group, the rule of the *stareshina* or house-father, that patriarchal bond of union which, as Aristotle tells us, was the earliest form of social combination known to the human race.

It would be interesting to trace the effects of newly-won liberty upon such a society as this, now



PRINCE FERDINAND OF BULGARIA.

that Bulgaria has completed the first decade of her freedom. But I must confine myself at present to describing some impressions of social life which I formed during recent visits to that country. It is customary in such descriptions to begin at the top, and I shall not venture to depart from established usage. At the head of Bulgarian society stands the Prince. For more than two years the eyes of Europe have been fixed with peculiar interest upon Prince Ferdinand. He occupies a position altogether unique, and unparalleled in European history. Unrecognised by diplomacy, but nevertheless favourably regarded by most of the great Powers, the lawfully-elected Prince of Bulgaria has ostensibly been disowned by the sovereigns of Europe and their representatives. Prince Ferdinand's isolation, however, has by no means injured him in the opinion of his subjects. The Bulgarians detest foreigners and foreign interference ; and their national pride is flattered by the fact that for two years and a half they have lived in peace and prosperity under their chosen prince without asking the leave of

Europe to do so. They have shown an admirable self-command in their steady resistance to Russian threats and promises. When half an hour after Prince Alexander had been kidnapped, M. Bogdanoff, the Russian representative, appeared on the balcony of the Russian consulate at Sophia, and told the people that the Czar would send them a new and better prince, he strangely misinterpreted the character of the Bulgarian nation. Once Prince Alexander, driven to desperation by the hostility of the Czar, determined to leave the country, the Bulgarians calmly undertook the duty of self-government under the Regency, and, far from applying to the Czar for a new ruler, they proceeded with due deliberation to choose a prince for themselves. The election of Prince Ferdinand is said to have been suggested in the first instance by M. Stöiloff, a highly-gifted statesman and a thorough patriot; but the Bulgarians in supporting Prince Ferdinand have mainly followed the lead of M. Stambouloff, the present Premier, whose influence over his countrymen is unbounded. They have been fortunate in their choice. Any one who remembers how much hostile criticism was directed against Prince Ferdinand when he first occupied the vacant throne of Bulgaria cannot fail to be struck by the altered tone of European opinion in the present day. At first every mouth was filled with comparisons between Prince Ferdinand and his ill-fated predecessor; popular sympathy went out to the hero of Slivnitza, and his many brilliant qualities gathered lustre from his unmerited misfortunes. Nobody had a good word for the new ruler of Bulgaria.

To-day all is changed. Bulgaria enjoys a tranquillity unknown to the neighbouring countries, and Prince Ferdinand is admitted to be a success. Two years ago even his best friends hardly thought it possible that he could remain many weeks in the country, for Russia's methods of creating difficulties for rulers of whom she does not approve, have hitherto been invariably successful. She has driven three princes from the throne of a neighbouring state and a fourth has been assassinated; Prince Alexander, too, as he states himself, narrowly escaped being murdered by his kidnappers. But Prince Ferdinand has strengthened his position day by day, and the hasty action of the Czar in withdrawing all his representatives from Bulgaria, has contributed not a little to this result. The Russian consulates—hitherto so many centres and rallying-points of disaffection—stand empty, and the Bulgarian government is thus relieved of one of its greatest difficulties. With secret conspiracies and other forces of disorder the vigilance of M. Stambouloff's administration is fully able to deal. Though at first inclined to favour the small group of Conservatives who represent the highest culture, but not the popular sentiment of their fellow-countrymen, Prince Ferdinand has of late given his entire confidence to M. Stambouloff. But he does not trust alone to the energy and popularity of his prime minister: from the day of his arrival in Bulgaria he has spared no pains to prove himself worthy of the respect and loyalty of his people. He works indefatigably, often sitting up late at night to peruse the official reports which his other duties have prevented him from attending to in the daytime, and rising at daybreak in order to take a brief spell of exercise on horseback before setting to work again. For two years and a half—except for a fortnight last October he has never left the country—he has devoted himself unceasingly to the service of his adopted people, living in self-imposed banishment from civilization and in daily risk of his life. It is not easy all at once to appreciate the extent of such a sacrifice on the part of a young man of high rank, great wealth, and refined tastes, who was free to follow the congenial paths of science, and had at his command every pleasure that European society can afford. Prince Ferdinand is an accomplished botanist; like the late Archduke Rudolph he is learned in ornithology; like him, too, he has been much given to travelling in pursuit of this fascinating branch of science. His sense of isolation at Sophia has been heightened by the diplomatic deadlock which precludes him from intercourse with the foreign representatives, who constitute the greater part of society in his capital. But perhaps his severest trial has been the difficulty of dealing with Bulgarian politicians. The ferocity of the struggle for portfolios in the newly-liberated lands of the East can hardly be conceived by those who are only acquainted with the comparative amenities of our Western politics. One must go to South America for a parallel. Bulgarian public men are poor, and the struggle for office is almost a struggle for existence. The habits of intrigue and conspiracy acquired under Turkish rule will hardly be got rid of in a single generation; the first care of a lately-appointed minister is still to crush his opponents and to fill all subordinate posts with his own creatures. For the first eighteen months Prince Ferdinand governed with a coalition ministry, the

members of which were continually plotting against each other ; and the fact that he succeeded in keeping them together for so long speaks much for his tact and judgment in reconciling hostile elements. His discouragements, however, do not end here. There is a stolidity and undemonstrativeness in the character of the Bulgarians which often lays them open to the charge of ingratitude towards those who have laboured in their cause. Prince Ferdinand has sacrificed not only the whole of his time and his energy, but he has also spent a large portion of his fortune in Bulgaria ; early in the present year, for instance, he made a munificent gift of a million florins for the purpose of founding a university. His generosity has not always been appreciated by those who have mainly benefited by it ; for some of the Bulgarians seem to take all favours as a matter of course, and to feel little or no regard for their benefactors. Nevertheless, the heart of the people is with their prince, whom they look upon as the type and embodiment of their own independence.

The Princess Clémentine, a daughter of King Louis Philippe of France, has done much to further her son's interests in Bulgaria. This gifted lady has inherited the best qualities of her ancient race without its failings ; amiable, accomplished, clever, courageous, possessed of infinite tact and kindness of feeling, she has won all hearts at Sophia and has smoothed over many of the social difficulties arising from the peculiar political situation. She can welcome the diplomatists to her Court whose relations with her son are still somewhat undefined ; she can place herself at the head of a society in which women are only beginning to emerge from the restricted seclusion of Oriental life. It would be unreasonable to expect a high standard of refinement and cultivation even in the highest class of female society at Sophia ; one must remember that a dozen years ago the Bulgarians were little more than helots and bondsmen, and also that they have not been uninfluenced by the Mohammedan view of the position of women. No Bulgarian lady has as yet, so far as I know, attempted to preside over a

salon or to organize social receptions on a large scale. Anything like hospitality in our sense of the word does not exist ; dinners and evening parties are unknown, except at the Palace and the houses of foreign diplomatists. Bulgarian statesmen and officials, however kind and courteous they may be to foreigners, rarely invite them to their houses ; their style of living is on the most frugal scale, as may be understood from the fact that many a Cabinet Minister has deemed himself rich on five hundred a year. To Englishmen whose native "passion for inequality" is gratified by enormous disparities of rank and wealth at home, there is nothing more striking than the slender lines of social demarcation in this land of democratic equality. The gap which separates the statesman, the professor, the advocate, and the military officer from the peasant is merely an educational one ; any one who can read and write is eligible for a seat in the National Assembly, where shepherds in sheepskins sit side by side with smart politicians in glossy black frock-coats.



A NEWLY-MARRIED COUPLE.

The open-handed liberality with which Prince Ferdinand entertains at the Palace is somewhat in contrast with the primitive frugality of native society at Sophia. The Palace is a handsome structure, standing in a garden, and commanding a charming view of the snowy heights of Mount Vitosch. On entering its gates one seems to pass from a region of semi-barbarism within the confines of European culture and civilization. There is a handsome and spacious entrance-hall, in which Prince Alexander was compelled by a party of drunken conspirators to sign the paper supposed to contain his abdication; here we see some large stuffed bears, and some specimens of rare birds which give evidence of Prince Ferdinand's taste for natural history. The rooms on the ground-floor are occupied by the suite; here and there we notice stands of arms, and feel afflicted with an unpleasant sense of the dangers which threaten a Prince of whom Russia disapproves. A wide stone staircase with lofty walls hung with large oil paintings leads up to the state apartments and to the Prince's private rooms, which are both on the first floor. The state apartments are spacious and well proportioned; in one of them is a fine collection of Bulgarian arms, ancient and modern, and some trophies of Slivnitza; in another there is a handsome full-length portrait of Prince Alexander, which had been taken down before the arrival of Prince Ferdinand, but which the latter, with characteristic good feeling, ordered to be replaced. The Prince's study is a charming room with windows commanding a fine mountain view; it is darkened with green blinds, and filled with rare and beautiful works of art. At the western end of the building is a large banquet hall; there is also a smaller dining-room opening into the winter garden from which Prince Alexander looked down on the mutinous soldiers who were firing into the windows of his palace; there is another dining-room on the ground floor in which the Prince and his suite have *déjeuner* and dinner during the hot months of summer. There is nothing like stiffness or formality at these repasts, for Prince Ferdinand always does his utmost to put those around him at their ease, and never leaves any one unnoticed or disregarded. His kindness and geniality pervade all those who surround him, and render a dinner at the Palace a very agreeable function indeed. The guest, who is always made to feel that he is welcome, is able to do better justice to the excellence of the *cuisine*; and the fact that for days previously he has been existing on the execrable fare supplied by Bulgarian innkeepers is not likely to diminish his powers of appreciation.

Of the diplomatic circle at Sophia I must not speak at length, as I am mainly concerned with persons and things Bulgarian. There is a curious variety in the relations of the various diplomatic agents with Prince Ferdinand. The Prince's position was formally recognized by King Milan; and M. Danich, the late Serbian representative, was the only member of the diplomatic body that appeared at the Palace on public occasions. The attitude of the other foreign agents is regulated by instructions from their several governments; the German agent, Baron Wangenheim, who has also charge of Russian interests, is not allowed to salute his Royal Highness, and is expected to leave the room when the Prince enters. The restrictions imposed on the French and Italian agents are not so severe; the attitude of the British agent, Mr. O'Connor, is friendly, though of necessity somewhat reserved; the Austrian agent, M. von Burian, is frequently with the Prince, and accords him every mark of respect short of official recognition. It will easily be understood that Prince Ferdinand's position is a very difficult one under the circumstances; he has maintained it with much dignity and delicacy of feeling. There is considerable life and social intercourse in the diplomatic circle at Sophia; the British Agency is especially noted for the kindly feeling and refined taste which distinguish its hospitalities. But the native Bulgarian element seems to assimilate itself somewhat slowly with this cosmopolitan society. It was not so much during my stay at Sophia, as when I accompanied Prince Ferdinand on his tours through the country that I found opportunities for observing the life and habits of the Bulgarian upper class. In all the towns through which we passed the Prince's guests and the members of his suite were lodged in the houses of the principal inhabitants; and I was thus enabled to make many acquaintances, of whose kind hospitality I preserve a lively recollection.

In Eastern Bulgaria the upper class are mainly Greeks, who have enriched themselves by mercantile pursuits. At Bourgas I was the guest of a Greek "corn-merchant," who, as I afterwards learned, was not really a corn-merchant at all; but on the shores of the Black Sea it is fashionable to style oneself a "corn-merchant" in imitation of the merchant princes of Odessa. The wily kinsmen of Odysseus who dwell in the maritime districts are said not to be over-scrupulous in their dealings with

the peasants from whom they purchase grain ; between the Greek merchant who buys his corn at fifty per cent. below its value, and the Greek tavern-keeper who charges him fifty per cent. too much for the mastic which he drinks, the Bulgarian peasant does not run a particularly good chance of dying a rich man. But at Slivno, Eski-Zagra, Kesanlyk, and elsewhere, I spent some time in the houses of Bulgarian families of the upper-class, from whom I received much kindness and attention. With a single exception the men had all adopted the "European" dress—black coats, polished boots, and even that abomination of civilization—the tall hat. The ladies appeared to dress with taste, notwithstanding their affection for brilliant colours. At Slivno, in the Balkans, the young man of the house addressed me in English ; like many of his



BULGARIAN PEASANTS IN HOLIDAY DRESS ABOUT TO DANCE THE "HORA."

fellow-countrymen of the same class and age he had been to Robert College, near Constantinople, an institution which is doing much to diffuse a knowledge of English in Bulgaria and the neighbouring countries. As a rule, some younger member of the household was acquainted with either French or German, and acted as my interpreter to the others ; but in one or two cases every attempt at interchange of ideas collapsed owing to the absence of a medium for communication. The Bulgarians of the upper class, though severely economical in other respects, spare no expense in educating their children ; there is a real desire for knowledge in this country, as well for its own sake, as because all advancement, social and political, depends on education. A Bulgarian is a little surprised when he hears that in England the "governing class" is not altogether composed of the best educated people. A large proportion of the peasantry is still illiterate, but education is making way ; it is interesting to notice that the school-house as a rule is the best building in the villages. Already the number of educated young men who despise agricultural work and look for higher employment has become a source of difficulty to the government.

The dwelling-houses of the better class never rise beyond two stories ; the greater number have only a ground floor with a kind of basement story below. Almost all of them are built on the same plan. The house stands in a small garden or court-yard, in the centre of which is a fountain. Here the ablutions of the family are performed ; this at least is my conjecture, as the usual utensils for washing are not generally to be found in the house. In one mansion there was a kind of trough provided with a piece of soap in the entrance hall ; the luxury of washing in private is not attainable as a rule, and the "tub" or hip-bath is absolutely unknown. When the guest announces his wish to wash his hands a female servant approaches with a diminutive jug and basin, or rather bowl ; he holds out his hands while she pours the water upon them in tiny dribbles ; in a moment she presents him with a towel, and the function is at an end. The indifference of Eastern Christians to the merits of water and soap seems to be a kind of reaction against the precepts of the Koran, which enjoin upon the faithful five washings a day ; in this respect our co-religionists appear to disregard the distinct injunctions of St. Paul. But I am digressing. From the garden or court-yard above mentioned a flight of six or eight steps leads up to the main floor of the house, which sometimes has a balcony in front. There is a large central corridor or hall, with one side exposed to the air, into which the doors of the other apartments open. Sometimes there is a house-door ; but as a rule the only way of closing the house is by locking the very unsubstantial doors of the various rooms. The bars, bolts, chains, massive locks and other apparatus of obstruction which fortify the English hall-door would appear superfluous to the simple-minded Bulgarian. The principal sitting-room, which, however, appears to be seldom used by the family, generally resembles the lantern of a lighthouse, an omnibus, or a railway signal-box, inasmuch as it is surrounded on two or more sides by contiguous windows ; in summer it is unbearably hot, in winter unbearably cold. A divan runs round the wall, covered with Bulgarian rugs of brilliant colouring ; sometimes there is a handsome Pirot carpet on the floor, the bare boards of which are always apparent. In the bedrooms, which are unfurnished with any species of crockery, there is usually a piece of gorgeous tapestry hung on the wall by the side of the bed ; one contemplates it with pleasure before rising in the morning. The bed itself, strewn with a rich coverlet of quilted silk, offers a pleasing prospect of repose, which, alas, is often dissipated by the attentions of innumerable bedfellows. How these houses, with their countless windows, thin walls, draughty rooms, and entrance-halls open to the weather, resist the fierce cold of a Bulgarian winter, is more than I am able to explain ; the huts of the peasants seem to be infinitely more comfortable.

The peasantry, which constitutes four-fifths of the population, is by far the most interesting, as it is the most numerous, section of Bulgarian society. Of the independent democratic spirit of the Bulgarian peasants, and its development under Turkish rule, I have already spoken ; it remains to say a few words concerning their manner of life and social condition. In Bulgaria there is no proletariat—that deadly offspring of an artificial civilization, which perhaps is destined, like Œdipus, to destroy its progenitor ; there is no poor law, for almost every peasant owns as much land as he wishes to cultivate, and the aged and infirm are cared for by the family or the house-community, as the case may be. The house-community or *zadruga*, the most interesting remnant of a patriarchal age, is still found in every South Slavonic land. Family groups, sometimes numbering several dozen persons, dwell together, as a rule within a single enclosure, though occasionally in neighbouring cottages. The members of these primitive associations hold all things in common, except, of course, their clothes and their wives ; there is a common dinner-table and a common hearth, a common grain store, and a common treasury. All submit to the rule of a *stareshina*, or house-father, elected by vote ; he is usually one of the oldest members of the community, and his wife generally acts as house-mother, though this is not always the case. The *stareshina* represents the community to the outer world ; he has a deciding voice in domestic affairs, and he apportions their work, whether in the fields or at home, to the several members of the society. The women work in the fields as well as the men ; and the quarrels which would inevitably ensue if they all remained at home together, are thus to some extent avoided. The absence of the prospect of individual gain does not, as might be supposed, tend to idleness ; on the contrary, the little commonwealth finds means to stimulate the energies of all, and even deposes its *stareshina* if his government fails to give general satisfaction. The *zadruga* has a

double interest, both as a relict of a primeval state of society and as the nearest existing approach to a realization of the theories of modern socialism.

In Bulgaria we see a peasantry frugal, thrifty, and laborious, in full possession of a land of surpassing richness and fertility. And yet Bulgaria is anything but an agricultural paradise. The system of cultivation is extremely primitive; the plough seems fashioned on the model of Triptolemus; the use of manure is unknown, and the only method of aiding the productiveness of the land is to let it lie fallow for a year. The peasant pastures his sheep, goats, horses, oxen, and buffaloes, on the village common-land; it is an interesting sight to see the motley herd returning to the village at sunset, each animal making its way to its night-quarters of its own accord. During the day the flock is watched by a shepherd lad or *shoban*, in a sheepskin coat with the woolly side turned in; he often brings his flute or bagpipes with him to beguile the tedious hours and to frighten away the eagles from his flock.

The vineyards, a latent source of immense wealth, are badly cared for; the wine, which ought to be of excellent quality and flavour, is spoiled in the making; the native taste is not fastidious, and the Bulgarians are not accustomed to make wine for exportation. The introduction of improved methods will be difficult, owing to the prevailing dislike of foreign ideas and innovations. The Bulgarian villages are often exceedingly picturesque; the low red-tiled or reed-thatched huts seem to nestle amid orchards and gardens of plum-trees; quaint-looking wooden granaries, like overgrown Noah's arks standing on legs, look down over roughly-made palisades, on which skulls of horses are placed to avert the evil eye; innumerable paths and lanes wind in and out among the houses and gardens, for, as a rule, there is nothing like a street. The villages generally lie hidden away from the main roads for reasons apparent to those who know the sad history of the country. The interior of the peasant's hut is generally clean and tidy; the imposing array of brightly-burnished copper utensils strikes the eye as one enters; there is a wide chimney with a stone hearth; dried skins, strings of onions, pictures of the Czar bought from Russian pedlars, guns, old pistols with quaint handles, pieces of bacon and other objects, adorn the walls. In a corner stands a small *eikon*, or image of a saint, with a tiny lamp hanging before it. The religious ideas of the Bulgarian peasant are somewhat vague; his Christianity is mingled with traditions of old Slavonic paganism, and the pope who teaches him is as ignorant and superstitious as he is himself. There are one hundred and eighty-three feast-days in the Orthodox calendar, in fact half the year; on these days no work can be done; many of the remaining or working days are fasts, and the peasant must do his work with insufficient

nourishment. It is best to visit a Bulgarian village on a feast-day or a Sunday, for then the peasants are to be seen in their picturesque holiday dress, and one may come in for a wedding or a village picnic. The ceremonies of the former are too elaborate to describe here; it is an interesting fact that the bride, on the day before marriage, takes a bath for the first time in her life. The picnic, as a rule, takes place in the village graveyard, owing, I believe, to an old Slavonic superstition that the dead participate in the feasts of the living. The *hora*, or national dance, invariably follows; the dancers range themselves in a large circle, holding each other by the hand or waistband, as represented in the engraving. The young men there depicted are eligible bachelors; the strap which they wear above the knee indicates that they are disposed to enter the bonds of matrimony. In the *hora* the youths and maidens seem rather to keep apart than otherwise; the practice of dancing in couples would be sternly reprobated by the Bulgarian Mrs. Grundy.



YAKO, POMAK BRIGAND, HANGED AT SOPHIA, JUNE, 1889.

There are many drawbacks to this interesting Arcadian life, but the only one of which I have space to speak is the insecurity caused by brigandage. Notwithstanding the vigorous efforts of Prince Ferdinand's government, brigandage still exists in Bulgaria. During my recent stay at Sophia seven brigands were hanged in the courtyard of the half-ruined mosque which serves for a prison. I was not present at the executions, which were witnessed by a large and fashionable assembly; but I attended the trial of the famous Rilo brigands and also that of the still more notorious highwayman Yako. The Rilo gang eluded pursuit with extraordinary cunning, frequently, under cover of night crossing the plain which lies between the Balkans and Rhodope, and appearing unexpectedly in northern Bulgaria, far away from their usual seat of operations. Some of them were shot by the police; their heads were cut off and photographed in a group (if I may so call it) with a member of the gang who was taken alive. According to the testimony of their prisoners, the brigands were exceedingly devout men, never omitting to say their prayers, and scrupulously observing, and making their captives observe, the fasts of the Orthodox Church. The remnant of the band was eventually arrested on Servian soil and given up to the Bulgarian government. The adventures of Yako would furnish a theme for a romance. The court-martial which tried him assembled in a disused restaurant close to the palace; the walls were still adorned with advertisements of champagne-merchants, with Bacchantes and flying cherubs, which seemed strangely out of place on such an occasion. At the end of the room was a table at which sat five officers in full-dress uniform; on a deal box at their feet lay the skulls of two gendarmes whom Yako had murdered; to the right of the court were the prosecutor and the advocates; on the left the prisoner, surrounded by gendarmes with fixed bayonets. The room was filled to overflowing; the front rows of seats were occupied by fashionably-dressed ladies. Yako, a handsome, strongly-built youth of twenty-three, seemed to regard the whole proceedings with the utmost nonchalance; it was only after sentence was passed that his air of *hauteur* gave way and he shed a few tears. His short life had, indeed, been an eventful one. At the age of eighteen he had deserted from the Bulgarian army and had taken to the mountains. In the winter, when the "season" was over he made his way to Constantinople, and there became acquainted with a wealthy Turk, an ex-official of the palace, who became his patron, supplied him with funds for his enterprises, and received a large share of the spoil. It appeared that Yako once gave this exemplary individual as much as £T250. During his campaigns Yako took absolutely no precautions for his safety; he had been known to saunter through the Balkan villages with his gun on his shoulder, nobody daring to interfere with him. Every winter he returned to Constantinople, where he enjoyed himself heartily and spent his income freely. He met his fate with courage, refusing even to petition the Prince for a commutation of his sentence. The case of Yako illustrates one of the principal difficulties of dealing with brigandage in the East. There are often persons behind the scenes—sometimes rich men—who enter into partnership with the "gentlemen of the forest"; and the peasants in the villages, either from fear or sympathy, supply them with food and ammunition.

The task of restoring social order and promoting commercial development in a land which for centuries has been given over to barbarism is a difficult one, and liable to many discouragements. But the solid progress the Bulgarians have made during the twelve years of their freedom, as well as the success with which they have vindicated their political independence against the designs of a mighty despotism, is of happy augury for the future, and throws a light upon the character of this remarkable people, who, I firmly believe, are destined to play a leading part in the final solution of the Eastern Question.