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**ALBANIA'S
ROAD TO
FREEDOM**



H.M. the King of the Albanians, Zog I.

ALBANIA'S ROAD TO FREEDOM

by

Vandeleur Robinson

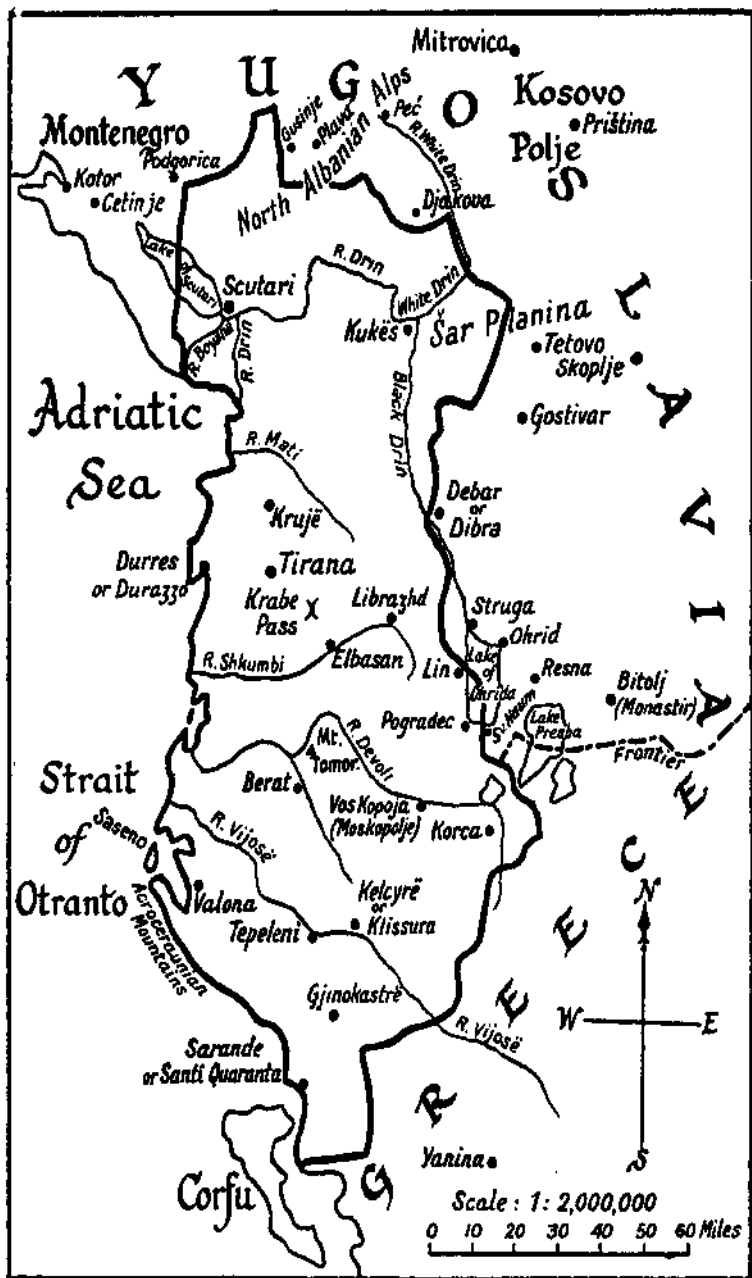
LONDON

George Allen & Unwin Ltd

First published in 1941

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY
THE ABERDEEN UNIVERSITY PRESS LTD.

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CHAPTER ONE

The Balkans' Oldest Inhabitants

Two events of very recent history have brought Albania to the notice of the world, reminding us of one of the awkward corners in the political jig-saw of Europe, and of another Humpty-Dumpty waiting to be put back upon his wall.

On Good Friday 1939 Mussolini's troops landed in Albania and quickly over-ran the entire country. The Moslem King, Zog the First, was obliged to flee, with his Hungarian Queen and her newborn son. The invaders proclaimed as King of Albania their own monarch, Victor Emmanuel III, King of Italy, Emperor of Ethiopia.

On October 28 1940 the Italian army in Albania crossed the frontier into Greece, seeking to add one more to the victims of the Rome-Berlin Axis. The Greeks, however, fought back, and before the month was over the legend of Italian invincibility had been broken; the Greek army stood everywhere upon Albanian soil. The Italian base at Korça (Kontza), the most enlightened of the Albanian towns, was captured. Argyrokastrë and Pogradec (down on the Lake of Ohrida) were also taken. Unfortunately, the German campaign in the Balkans has postponed the day of liberation.

The prospective liberation of Albania from the Italians raises questions in regard to the future of that country, and entails some study of the character and immediate past of the Albanian people. Most people know little of the Albanians, save that they are backward, addicted to the vendetta, and recently had a King with the almost unbelievable name of Zog. What more is to be known? Perhaps the first fact of interest is that they claim to be the oldest-established of all the Balkan peoples, senior in occupation to the Doric or Classical Greeks, and greatly senior to the Slavs and Bulgars

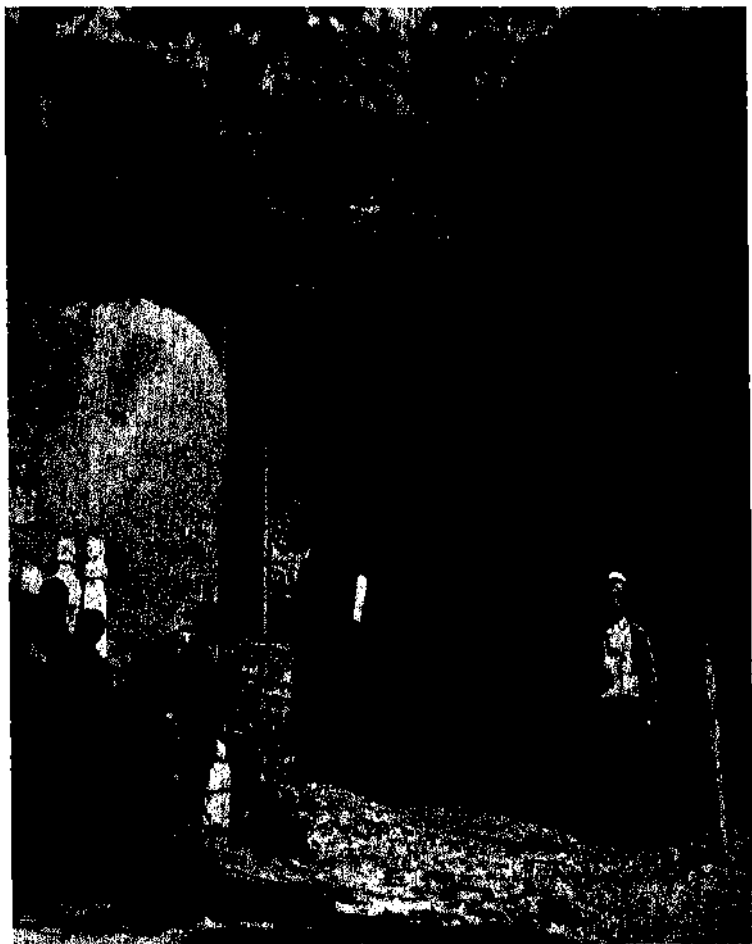
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and Turks. They speak a language compounded of Illyrian, Thracian, Latin, Slav and Turkish; their physical type is Dinaric, with flat-backed skulls. They number among their distinguished sons in antiquity no less a person than Alexander the Great; and also King Pyrrhus, renowned for his "Pyrrhic victories" against the Romans, whose name has been perpetuated in the region of Epirus, which forms the Southern part of Albania and the North-West of Greece.

The Illyrians, as the original Albanians are historically called, were driven by successive invasions of Greeks, Thracians and Slavs into the mountains of the West, where they have survived to this day. From time to time one or other of the neighbouring Balkan peoples, or such external conquerors as the Romans and the Turks, would subdue the Albanians; but to enslave or exterminate them was impossible, because the hardier spirits could always take to the mountains and continue an independent existence as brigands. During the Middle Ages the Balkan Peninsula formed a small arena of Power Politics, the participants being the Serbs, the Byzantine Empire and the Bulgars. Each of these was top-dog in the Peninsula twice; and each one, during its ascendancy, more or less controlled Macedonia and Albania. But whereas the successive changes of ownership in Macedonia have left a racial and linguistic muddle which gave rise in our own day to much blood-letting, Albania remained solidly Albanian. Finally, the Balkan arena was flooded by the Turks. When they departed, the Albanians were still there.

The peculiar feature of the Turkish or Ottoman Empire was that the distinction between ruling and subject peoples did not rest upon race, blood, language, geography, or any of the usual criteria of "nationality"; it rested solely upon religion. If you were a Moslem, you counted as a Turk, no matter what your national origin. If, on the other hand, you were an "infidel", then you were one of the subject "Greeks", for whom the Orthodox Oecumenical Patriarch at Constantinople was spiritually responsible; a Moslem might rob, maltreat or kill an infidel at his pleasure, and landowners must turn Moslem if they wished to be sure of retaining their estates.

The difference between the status of the Moslem and the



Skanderbeg's town: Kruja.

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Christian presented a strong inducement to any ambitious or propertied man to embrace Islam. Christianity did not go very deep with the Albanians, and although the Moslem population of non-Turkish origin is small throughout the Balkans, in Albania it is no less than 70 per cent. On the whole, the peasants in the South, having little property to lose, and leading more or less civilised lives around their Christian Church, clung to their Christianity; so also did the inaccessible mountaineers of the North, who could afford to defy the Turks. The more accessible people who had any property, particularly the landowners, turned Moslem, as did any ambitious young man who wanted a career as an administrator or a soldier. Under the Turkish Empire many Albanians rose to the highest positions. The KiupriU family furnished a whole dynasty of Grand Viziers; Mahomet Ali became Pasha of Egypt and founded the Khedival dynasty; Essad Bey Toptani, though a villain, was an able one; he commanded the fortress of Scutari and stood a siege by the Montenegrins, finally attempting to play a big part in Albanian politics, until his assassination in Paris in 1919; finally, Kemal Ataturk's parents were Albanian.

The Albanians regard as the greatest event in their history the successful stand against the Turks of their national hero, Skanderbeg. During the 'twenties and 'thirties of the fifteenth century, while the Turks were conquering Albania, they subdued several Christian principalities; to ensure the continued obedience of their new vassals, they took a number of young men of noble family to Turkey as hostages. One of these youths was George Alexander Castriotis, called by the Turks Iskandar Bey (meaning Lord Alexander) and known to Western history as Skanderbeg, which is an European re-translation of Iskandar Bey. Skanderbeg was brought up at the Turkish Court as a Moslem; but in middle life he suddenly abjured Islam, went off to Albania, and there set up as an independent Prince. In many campaigns he defied the Turks, and succeeded in maintaining his independence. His heroic exploits made him the hero of the Albanian people, and such he has remained to this day. After his death his successors were unable to hold out, and gave up

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the struggle. They retired to Italy, where the Marchese Castrioti is their present-day descendant.

The sentimental importance of Skanderbeg will be realised when it is seen that the modern King of Albania adopted the hero's helmet as his device; and Mussolini, seeking to endear himself to Italy's new subjects, unveiled a statue of Skanderbeg in the Piazza Albania in Rome, in the presence of a deputation from Albania, and of the Marchese Castrioti.

To all intents and purposes the history of the Balkan Peninsula ceased with the Turkish conquest, and began again where it had left off when the Turkish flood receded. Albanian history had little significance between the death of Skanderbeg in 1467 and the stirrings of nationalism, first discernible about seventy years ago.

During the last century the Balkan peoples emerged from Turkish rule, and established the States which now exist, but in more restricted frontiers than they now enjoy. Montenegro had never been fully conquered, and the other Serbian State, the Principality of Serbia, emerged from the Napoleonic Wars. Greece arrived next, after a fierce war of independence in the 'twenties. The Danubian Principalities attained practical independence, and then united, immediately after the Crimean War. Bulgaria was liberated by the Russians, and her Principality established by the Berlin Congress. These countries still had further co-nationals to redeem; but the Albanians were the only *whole people* in the Balkans who were still under Turkish rule at the beginning of the present century. The eventual rise of Albanian nationalism was due to the situation which emerged from the gradual dissolution of Turkey-in-Europe. With Serbia, Bulgaria and Greece all free, and Macedonia plainly only awaiting its turn, the Albanians faced the prospect of being cut off from Moslem Turkey, and "liberated" by the other "Christian" States. But 70 per cent, of the Albanians were Moslems, and under Turkish rule they enjoyed certain privileges, such as exemption from conscription. Even the Christian Albanians hated their Slav fellow-Christians. Division between Montenegro, Serbia, Bulgaria and Greece would deprive the Albanians of their privileges, and put

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them under rulers just as alien and far less easy-going. It was time for the Albanians to bestir themselves.

In 1877-8 the Russians defeated Turkey and imposed upon her the Peace of San Stefano, whose principal feature was the establishment of Great Bulgaria. This was the first example of the threat to the Albanians, for Bulgaria was to have Macedonia down to the Lake of Ohrida, and a slice of Albanian territory in addition. The leading Albanians promptly formed a patriotic "Albanian League" to resist the inclusion of Albanian territory in Bulgaria.

As it happened, the Albanian League had its job done for it in this instance by Great Britain, which forced a revision of the San Stefano Treaty, and the drastic curtailment of the Bulgarian Principality. But the Treaty of Berlin threatened Albania in a new quarter. Several districts in the North of Albania were now to be ceded to Montenegro. The Albanian League functioned as before, and the Sultan was embarrassed to find that his loyal subjects did not want to be detached from his Empire. The arrangement was revised, and smaller and different territories were given to the Montenegrins; but even so, Albanian resistance could not be overcome until the Turks had kidnapped the Chief of the Mirdite clan, Prenk Bib Doda, who was the leader of the opposition to cession. Doda spent many years in exile, and reappeared as Chief of the Mirditi in 1914.

The episode just related throws an interesting light upon the state of affairs in Northern Albania. Racially, the Albanians and the Montenegrins are akin, for the Dinaric stock, with flat back to the skull, has persisted among the Serbs of Montenegro as well as among the Illyrian Albanians. In religion, the Montenegrins and the Mirditi are Christian, whereas the Turks are Moslems. But far greater than the conflict between Moslem and Christian is the rivalry between different kinds of Christians; for the Mirditi and neighbouring tribes are Catholics, and the Montenegrins Orthodox. Even this does not entirely explain the feeling in the matter. Not only were the Albanians who remained in Albania and those who were to be detached co-religionists, and of the same language and

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"nation"; in addition, the drawing of a frontier in this district caused a grave interference with their marriage customs. The tribal customs of the northern Albanians, which survived alongside their adhesion to the Roman Catholic religion, entailed the search for a wife outside the actual tribe of which a man was a member. Thus, the young men of a given district habitually went to certain other districts to find wives; and it was now proposed to put a frontier between the bride and the bridegroom. Anyone with experience of Balkan policemen and frontier guards will know what difficulties this arrangement would place in the path of courtship.

Abdul Hamid was delighted to find somewhere in his dominions people who preferred his rule to that of the Christian principalities. He not unnaturally sought to turn the loyalty of the Albanians to account. In Old Serbia, in the Plain of Kossovo, to the North and South of the Sar Planina, and in Macedonia, the Sultan had need of loyal people, for the Christian States had cast their covetous eyes upon these regions. Albanians, therefore, were encouraged to settle there, and a considerable Albanian colonisation took place. The Great Powers and the Young Turks alike were pressing the Sultan to carry out reforms of his administration; planted in the disputed provinces, the Albanians presented a body of local opinion determined to sabotage any weakening of the Sultan's position vis-a-vis the Serbs. Some of the Young Turk leaders were Albanians, and looked for a stronger Turkish Government when the inefficiency of the Sultan's autocracy was removed.

In 1908 the Young Turks came into power, and immediately alienated the Albanians by a frenzy of "gleichschaltung", in which they sought to take away the privileges of the Albanians, and conscript them for military service in the Yemen. Moreover, it soon turned out that, although the distinction in law between Moslem and Christian was to be abolished, Turkish nationalism was to take its place, and to become one of the ruling class a man had now to profess not the religion of Islam but Turkish nationality. The Albanians became more and more disgusted, and until the autumn

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of 1912, when the Balkan War broke out, they were perpetually irrupting into Macedonia in armed forays, destroying stores of ammunition, and generally defying the Young Turk authorities.

In October 1912 the Balkan Allies set upon Turkey-in-Europe and tore it to pieces. The Albanians saw that the moment of decision had come; Serbia and Montenegro were eager to annex the Northern half of Albania; Greece would like the South. A group of notables assembled at Valona and issued the Declaration of Albanian Independence. The history of Albania since that day is that of the struggle to translate the Declaration into reality, and then to maintain it. But November 28th 1912 is counted as the day of the birth of the Albanian State; and in 1937 a quarter century of Albanian independence was celebrated in London by a party at the Albanian Legation.

CHAPTER TWO

Men of the Eagle

BEFORE we go on with the story of Albania, from the time when her people first undertook to set up a State of their own, a glance must be taken at the country and the inhabitants.

Albania is a block of territory situated on the eastern shore of the Adriatic. From North to South it is about 210 miles in length, and its width varies between 60 and 90 miles, the widest part being between the Lake of Ohrida and the sea. The country is mountainous, with a triangular plain between the Adriatic and the centre of the territory. The mountain barrier which shuts off the interior of the Balkan Peninsula from the Adriatic coast runs close to the sea all down Dalmatia to Montenegro; but then it turns a little inland, as Albania is reached, and the heights form Albania's eastern border. There are well-marked passes through the mountains: in the North, beyond Scutari, the "Albanian Gap"; in the South-East there are routes round both ends of Lake Ohrida. Strategically, therefore, Albania has an obvious part to play as a battlefield between Italy and Yugoslavia, and the Italians spent some years upon perfecting a plan for the defence of Albania against the Yugoslavs. The assumption was that the Albanian army would have to hold out until its ally could bring reinforcements from Italy. In the event, it was Italy which used Albania as a jumping-off point, and for a war against Greece instead of Yugoslavia. The jump failed, and for some months Albania was the battlefield between the Italians and the Greeks.

The Albanian towns are few and small. Tirana, the capital, has a population of somewhere about 30,000; but it is a wretched, overgrown village, with post-war modern additions. The surviving old part consists of low buildings, mostly of mud, and a bazaar. The post-war contribution comprises a couple of reasonably comfort-



Entrance to the Grand Mosque, Tirana.

Men of the Eagle

able hotels, a few prosperous houses, such as the King's palace and the Yugoslav Legation, a street or two of modern villas, mostly not very well built, and the public buildings in and near the Albanian "Whitehall".

This "Whitehall" consists of two rows of Ministries, facing each other across a sort of sunk lawn (formerly a duck-pond); there are some eight blocks, about three storeys high, each housing one or two Ministries. The further end of Whitehall takes the form of a kind of terminal roundabout or semicircle, after which the street wanders off into the fields and peters out. The whole of the Whitehall buildings would perhaps go into the County Hall at Westminster Bridge. At the town end of Whitehall is a mosque, and close to this an Orthodox Church. Opposite, looking down Whitehall, is an incredibly ugly building, Tirana Town Hall. Yet this deplorable object contrives to give an impression of greater importance than, say, the Prime Minister's office, or the large villa down the main street (first built as an officers' club, but then commandeered by the Government) which bears over its portal in large letters the inscription "Parliament".

Across the main street, from the intersection of Whitehall, there begins an avenue, known before the Italian occupation as the Boulevard Zog, in which important personages have villas, surrounded by high walls. The villa of the King himself is not in the Boulevard, but in a walled garden standing back from the main road itself; it is known as the Palace, and is not pretentious. The gateway is guarded by sentries in modern uniforms. Opposite the King's gate are two villas—one used to be occupied by the King's sisters, the other by the Italian Legation.

The bazaar district includes a somewhat primitive cinema. In other respects it resembles other Balkan bazaars, such as that of SkopHje. The scene is greatly improved from an aesthetic point of view by the minarets of the several mosques.

Five minutes' walk from the centre of the town brings one into the country. Avoiding the barracks, and the fields near them, in which one used to be able to see part of King Zog's army at drill,

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one could roam along a mule path, populated, in the early afternoon, by strings of ponies and donkeys, carrying tired peasants back to their homes after a strenuous day selling firewood and other commodities in the Tirana market. The people seemed stolid and depressed, without the cheerfulness and laughter which I noticed in the Albanians of Macedonia.

South-east of Tirana, an afternoon's drive across the Krabe Pass, by a road built by the Italians, lies Elbasan. There is something "golden road-ish" about the name of this town, and the town itself does not altogether belie it, for it is a delightful oriental place, full of mosques, picturesque houses and alleys and courtyards, and equally picturesque people. The newer mosques are kept in good repair by the pious benefactors who have caused them to be built; the older are allowed to fall into disrepair, when they become unfashionable, or the families which were interested in them die out. One of the mosques has an Arab Imam. The shopkeepers of Elbasan spend the fruits of their prosperity upon somewhat jerry-built modern villas, and with each access of wealth they add a new storey; three storeys is the mark of a comparatively rich man. The snag about building is that the Albanian labourer is inclined to be an irresponsible person, and a contemner of innovations; the utmost stringency of supervision, coupled with the importation, at some expense, of certain fittings, is necessary if jerry-building is to be avoided. When I was in Elbasan Mrs. Hasluck, an English resident, was building a house; she described some of the difficulties she had in getting her wishes carried out.

At Mrs. Hasluck's former house I "saw in" the New Year. The town has electric light, which is turned off at the power-station during daylight. At twelve o'clock the electricity authorities signalled the advent of the New Year by dimming the light three times. Rufus Buxton was with me; as we returned to our hotel, it was not particularly cold, and there was no snow about. On the way we listened to the groups of young men still singing in the streets. There was a bright moon, which ensilvered the walls of the houses and lighted the thin, long pencils which were minarets, making

Men of the Eagle

them stand out as on a back-cloth, well painted. In the distance was the pyramid of Mount Tomor. It was a scene of unforgettable beauty. Alas, that "Elbasan saw another sight", when the bombs dropped at dead of night.

Some twenty-five miles west of Tirana, upon the Adriatic, lies Durazzo. This is the Dyrrachium at which Julius Caesar landed on his way to defeat Pompey at Pharsalus. It is a dismal town, with little of interest or beauty save the mediaeval fortifications, a relic of the time when it was the seat of various Albanian principalities. The British Legation used to be at Durazzo, though the Albanians always hoped that we should move it up to Tirana. However, it was impossible to find in Tirana a building worthy to house His Britannic Majesty's representative; and to build one presented some difficulties. During King Zog's reign the Italians spent immense sums (loans to the Albanian State) upon improvement of the harbour facilities of Durazzo, which was to be their base in the event of war. The harbour was, so one was informed, being dredged and equipped and generally made ready; but four years ago it still looked a desolate place, consisting of two long breakwaters, a sailing-ship or two, a few sailors of the Royal Albanian Navy, the passenger steamer from Bari, and, in the distance, two silvered oil-containers, gleaming in the afternoon sunshine; probably the R.A.F. has dealt with these by now.

Up in the north of Albania is the important town of Scutari, on the lake of the same name. In Turkish times Scutari was a fortress, and the Albanian mountaineers (whose rightful metropolis it was) were not allowed to approach the town. In 1913 the Montenegrins, assisted by a Serbian division, besieged it. The Governor, Hassan Riza Pasha, and his second-in-command, Essad Bey Toptani, were both Albanians. Riza wished to save the town for Albania, but Essad had him murdered on his way back from a dinner party at his house, and himself succeeded to the command. His plan was to give Scutari to the Montenegrins, as the price of their support for an attempt to make him, Essad, Prince of Albania. Eventually Essad capitulated to the Montenegrins, and the garrison was allowed

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to march out with the honours of war. The Great Powers, however, compelled the Montenegrins and Serbians to withdraw, and themselves occupied the town until it could be handed over to the new Albanian Principality. The local people thought Scutari ought to be the capital of the new State, and it was accordingly for some time after the Great War the centre of successive northern rebellions.

In the southern part of the country is the town of Valona, with a fine natural harbour. This has been greatly coveted by the Italians, who occupied it during the Great War. In the post-war epoch of war-weariness, being unwilling to put forth the necessary effort to retain their acquisition against the Albanians, they evacuated the mainland. They retained, however, the island of Saseno, at the mouth of the bay. This island may be a useful *pied-h-terre*, but is no use as a base against a hostile mainland, since it is overlooked by the neighbouring hills; these are the "Acroceraunian Mountains" from which, in the poem, "Arethusa arose from her couch in the snows".

Switching across to the south-east, the town of Korea, better known as Kontza, occupied by the Greeks in their advance, is by way of being the most advanced, the most civilised, of the Albanian towns. It is the local capital for the Moslem landowners, the seat of various educational experiments, and of an Orthodox Christian Bishopric. If, at the end of the war, our extremely satisfactory allies the Greeks put forward claims for a "rectification of frontier" in the region which they have liberated, Korea, as well as Gjino-kastre, is a likely demand; for it is in the Northern Epirus, and the Epirus as a whole (partly Albanian and partly Greek) formed the basis for the ancient kingdom of Pyrrhus, and for the more modern despotism of the Albanian Ali Pasha of Janina. However, an Inter-Allied Frontier Commission after the last war went carefully into the question of this frontier, and gave Korea to Albania; and in 1926 the Greek Dictator, General Pangalos, himself of Albanian origin, voluntarily handed to the Albanians a block of villages in the Korea neighbourhood, in the interests of a correct ethnographic frontier. Korea is (or was in 1930) a town of some 22,000 inhabitants.

Men of the Eagle

My first glimpse of Albania, a year or more before I actually entered the country, was from the Yugoslav side of the Lake of Ohrida, which there forms the frontier. I had travelled to the little town of Ohrid by motor-bus from Skophje, and one of my fellow-travellers was the Commandant of the Ohrid garrison, who had been recalled from leave because there was a political disturbance going on in the south of Albania. For the same reason, the passenger steamer from Ohrid to Pogradets (on the Albanian shore) had suspended its sailings. The Lake is a wide one, and Albania was represented to me by distant mountains.

It was at Ohrid, also, that I first had dealings with an actual Albanian, and leisure to observe something of his character. This book is by no means a travelogue or narrative of touristic experience; but an anecdote or two will best serve to introduce the various types of Albanian. It is certainly desirable to take a look at the Albanians themselves, before we resume the story of their political fate in an exciting quarter-century of semi-independence, or speculate about their future when Hitler and Mussolini have receded into the past. My first Albanian acquaintance, then, was the owner-driver of a couple of ponies, upon which I set out with Clare Holmgworth (my wife) for a day's jaunt along the shore of the Lake.

In the bazaar at Skoplije I had made a purchase of which I am still extremely proud; this was an incredibly ancient pair of riding-boots, black, of soft leather, patched and mended, but still useful, and still in use. I got these boots for 65 dinars the pair, or five shillings and fivepence of our money. For this reason, if for no other, I was determined at the earliest opportunity to get upon a horse and try my newly-acquired boots. It proved impossible to hire anything that in England would be recognised as a riding-horse, still less the appropriate harness. Real horses and saddles are only found in that part of the world in the possession of the Yugoslav army, and I was obliged to hire a couple of skinny ponies with Turkish saddles of extreme primitiveness. This saddle consisted of a wattle framework, padded below and above with blankets. The

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harness was merely a few pieces of string and cord; one of these led to the horse's mouth, another went round his body, and a third tied the back of the saddle to his tail. There could be no pretence at riding; the procedure is merely to sit upon the animal's back and be carried along, to save the trouble of walking; but from my experience it is an open question whether riding or walking is the more tiring. I suppose I ought to have sat sideways on; but I insisted on riding astride, and (unwisely, as I now think) got the driver to make stirrups of cord. The structure of the saddle effectively prevented such refinements as a grip with the knees; nor could I get my heels under the lower bars of the wattle, to kick the animal's flanks. Motion was imparted to the beast by the driver, who ran along behind, every now and then whacking the creature's quarters with a stick, and thus inspired him to break from an ambling walk to a gentle jog-trot. Any sudden start, however, was to be avoided, for the usual consequence was to break one of the strings, thus sending the saddle over the horse's head.

The driver was a happy-go-lucky, irresponsible Albanian. Sometimes he would run along, shouting at the horse; sometimes he would meet a friend, and stand in the road chatting for ten minutes. The horse ambled on, leaving him behind. Presently, when one had given up hope of ever seeing the Albanian again, he would come tearing down the road at a terrific rate, yelling joyously.

I tried to converse with this man; but although he proudly claimed to speak Albanian, Serbo-Croat, Bulgarian, Rumanian, Greek and Turkish, my few words of one or two of these languages turned out not to be the same ones which he knew. Not to be outdone, I laid claim to English, French, German, and a few other tongues of which I had a smattering; but it was evident that he considered these barbarian dialects, not worth consideration by an Albanian.

The day was hot, and we passed by a vineyard. The driver sprang suddenly among the vines, and emerged with bunches of grapes, which he laid upon our saddles, with gestures of invitation. I ate a few of the grapes, which were desperately sour, and the



The author goes riding.

Men of the Eagle

driver went through a pantomime which I took to mean (but doubted) that the vineyard belonged to him personally.

We reached a lake-side village; it proved to be Serbian. Here there was the inevitable ex-soldier who had served in the Serbian army on the Salonika front during the Great War, and had picked up a smattering of Tommies' English. He explained that all the Moslems (he referred to them as "Turks") had been made to leave this village, which was now purely Serbian; not far off was a "Turkish" village which had chucked out all its Serbs. The people at this village recognised my Albanian for a Moslem, and immediately classified him as a "Turk". As we sat down to eat, the English speaker pointed to the driver, and remarked disdainfully: "Your Turk can eat over there". I was reminded of the Wodehouse butler, bringing in a snake on a tray, and remarking to the young man: "Your serpent, Sir".

The meal on such an occasion ought to consist of Ohrida trout. This famous delicacy of Roman times was once, it is said, flown to England, freshly caught, to be eaten at the Aga Khan's luncheon party. However, to-day was Sunday, and no fish was available. I fed on under-cooked eggs and the local red wine, which certainly tasted like the Albanian's sour grapes, but also had a distinct flavour of the roadside dust; it made me ill.

As we ambled back towards Ohrid, there was a family of goats on the road. The simple-minded Albanian took great pleasure in driving them before us. When they had left the road, he diverted himself by running down to the lake side to pick a reed or two, or by exchanging yells at a considerable distance with some friend of his in a field. Stiff and weary, we eventually got back to our hotel. Somehow I felt that the driver was probably washing the dust from his throat with the proceeds of "hire of horses", and leaving the rubbing down of the animals till to-morrow; however, I may have wronged him.

This man was quite typical of one kind of Albanian; he was regarded by the more solid Serbs as a bit of a joke. There are, however, other types, and one, the mountaineer, is in great contrast

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to the slightly *diracxni* liveryman of Ohrid. Let Us consider for a moment the Malessori, or mountain men, tall, proud, members of tribes, carrying their rifles, and engaging (a few years ago) in family blood-feuds for generations, according to the much venerated Law of Dukhajin.

In the year 1913, Vice-Admiral Sir Cecil Burney commanded an international force of bluejackets and Marines of the principal Powers, in temporary occupation of Scutari. Among those present was Miss Edith Durham, who for twenty years had been travelling in the Balkans, particularly in Albania, whenever she had the opportunity. Miss Durham, as an expert upon Albanian affairs, represented to the Admiral that the neighbouring Malessori would welcome an opportunity to visit Scutari. In Turkish times (which had ended only a month earlier, with the capitulation of Essad) it had been thought necessary, in case of trouble, to keep the armed mountaineers out of the town. Throughout living memory, a barrier had stood across the road outside the city, and that was as close as the mountaineers could approach. Centuries earlier, before the arrival of the Turks, and even later, at intervals during the Turkish occupation, Scutari had been the seat of an Albanian Principality, and the exclusion of the Malessori from their own city was an age-long grievance. Sir Cecil Burney accepted Miss Durham's advice, knowing her enormous prestige with the Albanians, and invited a large party of Malessori for a kind of State Visit to Scutari. *

My father was at that time Major of Marines, and commanded the British contingent in the barracks. (Since the departure of the former garrison, these had been lavishly disinfected.) He took part in the entertainment of the guests. When they reached the barrier, at the entrance to the town, they found established there a sort of cloak-room, in which they deposited their firearms. These were antique guns and rifles, some of them beautifully damascened and ornamented. The men themselves were all of them well over six-foot tall, and were at once cheerful and dignified, with the natural good breeding so often found in simple peoples, particularly in mountainous country. In the course of their visit to the town, they

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were entertained to a feast, and the Admiral, through an interpreter, made them a speech. The visitors put up a spokesman to reply, and the speaker, rising to the occasion, asserted that the day upon which the Malessori had again entered their town of Scutari was "the most historic date since the birth of Jesus Christ".

Between the north and the south of Albania there are considerable differences in custom, dialect and dress. In the southern districts, though not in the north, the fustanella is the distinctive item of clothing. It is a beautiful white, pleated kilt. This garment is worn by both Albanians and Greeks; it forms part of their ceremonial uniform of the Greek Evzones, or guards. The northern Albanians do not wear this kilt, but most commonly a kind of white felt trousers, close at the bottom, not unlike jhodpurs, and fastened with a belt round the hips. They look immensely hot, and somehow terribly untidy and insecure at the waist.

There is a certain parallel between the Albanians and the Highland Scots, the kilt and the bagpipe being common to both, as also the clan system and the reckless courage, sensitive honour, and strict observance of a code of hospitality. The Albanians carried this practice of hospitality into their feud system, so that a member of a household where there were guests would go outside and yell to all neighbouring houses to lay off shooting, as the feud must wait until the guest had gone on his way.

It appears that there has in times past been some Albanian settlement in Sicily and in Corsica, so the practice of the vendetta in these various countries may not be so fortuitous as it might appear. The Albanians say that the feud was necessary in Turkish times, because there was little policing and less justice, and some sort of system had to be evolved for neighbours to adjust their differences. It is questionable, however, whether the feud did not exist in pre-Turkish times. King Zog attempted to eliminate the blood-feud by measures of disarmament, policing, and the bringing together and formal reconciliation of persons who were at feud with each other. He undoubtedly made some progress; but so long as the feud was not entirely archaic (as it was not) he himself was

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in danger of murder by any of those whose relations had been slain in the course of the royal execution of justice, the putting down of rebellions, or other functions of semi-despotic government. (The danger of assassination by personal and political rivals, or ideological opponents, was, of course, much more serious.) It used to be said just before the Great War that the vendetta was responsible for as many as a quarter of all the deaths in Albania, and for as many as 40 per cent, of the deaths in a particularly vendetta-ridden locality.

Another type of Albanian is the man, generally young, who has joined the administrative services, particularly the Gendarmerie. From 1925 until 1938 the policing of the country was carried out by a force with Albanian personnel, including officers, but British "Inspectors" who actually ran it. There was a British Major-General at the head, as Inspector-General, and some ten British Colonels as Inspectors, in charge of the various districts. These were retired officers of the British army, personally engaged by King Zog to run his Gendarmerie. They brought their force to a high degree of efficiency. Incidentally, they made Albania a very pleasant place for an Englishman to visit, since he could always rely upon effective help and a friendly reception from the nearest British officer.

On New Year's Day, on the same journey during which I saw the New Year in at Elbasan, I drove with Rufiis Buxton by car to Struga, across the frontier in Yugoslavia. We went from Elbasan up the Skumbi valley to Librazhd, over the pass, down the road towards the Lake of Ohrida, across the hill frontier near Lin, and so down to the lake-side town of Struga. As we were setting out from our hotel at Elbasan we were asked by the innkeeper to give a lift to a Lieutenant of Gendarmerie, who, like us, had been seeing the New Year in at Elbasan, and now wished to return to his post at Librazhd. What he would have done, had we not been available, I do not know; it is not much use trying to hitch-hike in Albania, for a day or a week might have gone past without a car passing along the road from Elbasan. However, I suspect that the hotelier had assured him the previous evening that two Englishmen were driving through Librazhd on the morrow.



Waiting for the conveyance : Shkoder (Scutari),



In the market-place : Shkoder (Scutari).

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The Lieutenant was a smart figure. The Gendarmerie uniform was of British cut, but Italian colour; the effect was excellent. As we went up the valley, he discoursed cheerfully in Italian about the game to be found in the forest through which we were passing. I particularly remember that he mentioned bears; unless, indeed, my imperfect knowledge of Italian led me astray. When we reached Librazhd we all drank a coffee together, the Lieutenant, Rufus Buxton, the chauffeur and I, sitting at a table outside the hostelry. It is not in every European country that one can comfortably sit outside and drink coffee on New Year's Day.

In the same general class as the Lieutenant of Gendarmerie I should put the young men who have studied abroad, or have been well educated in the Gendarmerie or other service, and who are full of zeal for the freedom and the elevation of their country. We shall have presently to consider both the general corruption of the older generation of politicians, and the question of whether a small and poor country like Albania can ever be really independent, or whether Italy, having sunk much money in the country, is not entitled to have at least a Mandate over it. It is a help, in considering such questions, to remember the intelligent, educated, energetic young men, such as Fuad Aslani, who was Foreign Minister in 1936, or some of the young diplomatic staffs abroad, who speak the language of civilisation, and genuinely try to promote it in their country whenever they are given the chance. Moreover, Albania is not without scholars. Shakespeare has been put into the vernacular; and as the Albanian translation is in the Albanian spoken to-day, whereas our text is in Elizabethan English, it is not unfair to say that Shakespeare is by some in Albania better understood than it is in this country. The leading Albanian scholar is Bishop Fan Noli, once Prime Minister (in 1924) and now living quietly in the United States. Among other works, he has translated "Don Quixote"* into Albanian. One should not over-emphasise these people, but it is only fair to recognise that, like other predominantly peasant and recently enslaved peoples, the Albanians have their scholars, their civilised men, their men of vision.

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Before leaving the Albanians, a word should be said about the position of women. These habitually work beside their men-folk in the fields, and in the North they sit also on the village councils. In the South the wives of the well-to-do Moslems were until recently veiled. The legal abolition of polygamy did not greatly affect their household arrangements, partly because polygamy had not been common there in any case; and partly because, owing to the patriarchal method of living, where the sons and grandsons of the householder lived with him and brought their wives home, the women of the family would in any case be sufficiently numerous to form a feminine colony within the household. About 1923 the enclosure of women ceased; schools were founded for them; and in 1930 King Zog expressed himself as in favour of "cultural freedom for women, and their equality before the law, but they should not take part in politics". In 1929 Moslem women appeared unveiled at the King's birthday celebrations. The King's nieces dress in European style, and do not, of course, wear veils. More recently, the King abolished both the wearing of veils and the custom of betrothing infants.

The religions of Albania are four; or, if one counts the small sect of Uniates, five. There are two kinds of Moslems (Sunnis and Bektashis) and two kinds of Christians (Orthodox and Catholic). The Moslems are roughly 70 per cent., the Orthodox 20 per cent., the Catholics 10 per cent., of the population. Their religious institutions, however, must wait for another chapter. The curious racial minorities within Albania, and the very large Albanian minorities abroad, will also be discussed later.

One may sum up the description of the different types of Albanians by likening them to the different kinds of birds which are to be met with in that country. The Albanians call themselves in their own language *Shqiptare* (literally "eaglers"), or men of the eagle; and the mountain eagle still lives wild among their crags. It often happens that in some place like Elbasan a hardy fellow offers for sale an eagle which he has captured in the mountains—or possibly he has taken an egg and reared it. What one would want to do with a live eagle,

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if one bought it, is far from clear. Secondly and thirdly, one sees everywhere in the fields the hooded crow and the jackdaw; though, like some of our multiple shops, they seem to have made between them a division of territory, and it is asserted that in districts where one species of this bird is found, the other is conspicuous by its absence. Finally, on every side is that beautiful bird the magpie. You may see him in a farmyard, in considerable numbers, pecking for food, jumping on to the back of a placid pig, exploring this promising terrain for interesting victuals; then flying across the valley in a flash of black and white, his long tail giving an added grace to his stylish, elegant plumage.

The human types in Albania correspond with the birds. The mountaineer, proud and violent, is the true Eagle Man. The peasant, irresponsible like the horse-driver of Ohrid, wearing a black or white skull-cap or diminutive fez, according to his religion, corresponds to the jackdaw, hopping about in the maize-fields. For the hoodie, with his dark plumage and grey head, think of the Albanian politician, inherited from the Turkish regime, in his European clothes, working in his brick or stone-built office, living in a modern villa, paid for with the proceeds of his political career. The magpie is the smart young army or Gendarmerie officer, neat and efficient, or the educated young diplomat or administrator. The chief of the magpies is the King, whose resplendent white uniform and black cape typified, until 1939, the magnificence of the Mbret e Shqipnis—the King of the Eagle Men.

CHAPTER THREE

The Minorities

BEFORE we leave the subject of the Albanian people, it is necessary to glance at the minorities, both of non-Albanians in Albania and of Albanians in the neighbouring States, since these (or some of them) give rise to serious political problems.

To finish with the classifications of the Albanians of Albania, those of the North are generally called Ghegs, those of the South Tosks, and between the two there are notable differences of dialect. Broadly speaking, the tribal organisation survives among the Ghegs, but is practically extinct among the Tosks.

The secondary classification is that of religion. All over the country there are Moslems, who comprise some 70 per cent, of the population. They are divided into Sunnis and Bektashis, the latter being monastic. The 30 per cent, of Albanians who are Christians are in the proportion of two Orthodox to one Catholic; the Catholics are found in the North, the Orthodox in the Centre and South. These religious differences have their importance, but the subject must be postponed till a later chapter. Here, however, two points fall to be noticed: first, that the Catholics appeared to the Italians to be promising material, and it was upon their co-religionists around Scutari that the Italian Government used to try to work, when it seemed desirable to foment rebellion against the Moslem King. Secondly, the Orthodox Church in the South was, until 1937, definitely a "Greek" Church; that is to say, it formed part of that residual Orthodox community which was run by the Greek Oecumenical Patriarch, and conducted its services in Greek, not having managed to hive off into an Albanian National Church. This being so, it was possible for Greek nationalists to claim that the southern Albanian Orthodox Christians were "Greeks", as, according to the Turkish distinction (counting all Moslems as Turks and all Christians



Gypsies—a racial minority
in Albania.



A Southerner wearing the
fustanella: Gjinokastre
(Argyrokastro).

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as Greeks) they were. But the religious classification left over from the Turkish regime does not suffice to determine the language or the "nationality" of a modern man, and to call the Albanians of Orthodox faith "Greeks" merely confuses the national issue in a region where national feeling is strong. Of this, more in a moment.

Before looking into the serious minority questions, let us briefly notice two curious racial fragments, which exist all over the Balkans, but are well represented in Albania. A portion of the Romanised Thracians who lived in the Balkans before the arrival of the Slavs have survived in small communities to this day; they are called Vlachs, or Koutzo-Vlachs. Their language is derived from Latin, and is identical with the language of the much larger people of Romans and Thracians, or Dacians, further North, the Romanians. Thus, the Koutzo-Vlachs form an outlying portion of the Romanians, and when (as often happened in the post-war years) Vlachs migrated to Romania, they were indistinguishable from other Romanians. I remember meeting in Bucharest an official of the Romanian Propaganda Ministry; he was a Koutzo-Vlach, but his native tongue was Romanian, and he himself was merely a rather outlandish Romanian. The Vlachs are particularly numerous as a pastoral people in the Pindus Mountains, a little to the south of the Albanian frontier, in Greece. There are some Vlachs also in Albania itself, but they are fairly well assimilated to Albanian life, except that they use the Romanian language among themselves.

The other fragment, or pair of fragments, is the gypsies, of whom there are two kinds in Albania, the one settled and the other nomadic. The latter used, until a few years ago, to practise a kind of nautch dancing, said to be (when performed by a girl with a lithe figure) extremely alluring. The Albanian Government, however, found it necessary to discourage an art which incited to, and often was the prelude to, immorality; they therefore prohibited this kind of dancing, under severe penalties. Immorality must now be carried out in a more modest manner!

After these two minor groups, there comes the one serious internal minority problem of Albania; the Greek minority in the

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South. The South of Albania and the North-West of Greece form a geographical area which used in Classical times to be known as Epirus. The name has now been revived by the Greeks, together with a claim that the area as a whole is inhabited overwhelmingly by Greeks. As a matter of fact, the Greeks and Albanians are much intermingled in this area; but if the criterion of religion is misapplied many good Albanians are called Greeks; and, for that matter, many others are counted as "Turks" and deported to Turkey. In the latter part of the eighteenth century, an Albanian Moslem named Ali Pasha of Tepeleni rebelled against the Turks, and, like a modern Moslem Skanderbeg, maintained a sort of despotism in Epirus, with his seat at Janina. Ali's subjects spoke Albanian in the northern part of his domain, and Greek in the south; the business men and secretaries spoke and wrote Greek, which was then the language of commerce and civilisation in those parts. In the eighteenth century, at the time of the Greek War of Independence, Ali Pasha was eventually conquered and slain by the Turks.

When the Albanian Principality was being established, in the months immediately preceding the Great War of 1914, the question arose of drawing Albania's Southern frontier. The Greeks determined to ensure that the Southern district of Albania (as it now is) should be allotted to them, on supposed ethnographic grounds; they thought to count all adherents of the Orthodox Church as Greek, and to drive out all the Moslems. With this aim, the Orthodox (Greek) Bishop of Janina led hordes of Greek irregulars into territory inhabited by Albanians, and burned numerous Albanian Moslem villages. (This is the same Bishop who, upon the capture of Argirokastro by the Greeks towards the end of 1940, was again heard of making propaganda for the annexation of North Epirus.) It was not difficult to persuade the Western European Powers that the non-Moslems, who did indeed belong to a "Greek" Church, with a Greek liturgy and Greek Bishops, should be counted as Greeks; that the prosperous business men who used Greek for their commerce were indeed Greek; and that hundreds of telegrams sent from "Greeks" of the area were genuine.

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The immensely complicated problem of nationality in this area is well illustrated by a story which is supposed to have occurred at Geneva in 1924. The League was discussing a minorities question, and someone suggested that, as between Greece and Albania, language was the true criterion; that is to say, the language which a man spoke in his own home. It then transpired that the rulers of these two countries each belonged, by this criterion, to his opponents' country; Bishop Fan Noli, then Prime Minister of Albania, was said to speak Greek at home (though he is the greatest living Albanian scholar), while the President of the Greek Republic, Admiral Kondounotis, a member of one of the Albanian families long settled in Hydra, habitually spoke Albanian in his own home circle.

When the Great War came to an end, and the decision was taken that Albania should be an independent State, the Conference of Ambassadors sent a Boundary Commission to fix the frontier between Albania and Greece. The result of their work was to leave some 30,000 to 50,000 Greeks in Albania; for these Albania was obliged to provide minority schools, in which the language of instruction was Greek. This the Albanians were very naturally most unwilling to do, for they knew only too well the role played by minority schools in the Balkans. Just as in Macedonia before the Balkan Wars, so now in Southern Albania, the minority schools were abused by being made the vehicle for an alien propaganda. The Albanians assert that the Greeks supplied as teachers for the minority schools army officers in plain clothes, with a definitely propagandist mission. Whenever the Albanians tried to escape from their obligation, the League of Nations was invoked, and they were brought back into line.

The confusion of the issues in Southern Albania is unfortunately a deliberate policy of the Greeks. It has been noticed that in 1914 a Greek Bishop set about altering the ethnic character of a whole region. He did not stop at burning Moslem villages, but also sent to the Great Powers numerous telegrams from alleged Greeks in Southern Albania; Miss Durham had to ride some miles on horseback to a place free from Greeks, from which to telegraph to England

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that the supposed "Greek" telegrams were bogus; most of the senders were non-existent persons, and others had merely had their names forged. That this unfortunate policy is not dead is shown by certain recent evidence; for when the Greeks took Gjinokastre (or, as they call it, Argyrokastro) they brought to the town the same Bishop who had been so energetic in 1914, and got him to say a Te Deum in the cathedral. He did not give thanks for the victory over the Italians, but for "the reunion of the town with Greece". Gjinokastre is an Albanian town.

Korea is a partly Moslem and partly Orthodox town, but Albanian. The Greeks say that it is 75 per cent. Greek; they have said so recently. It may possibly be maintained that the population is as to 75 per cent, of the Orthodox religion, though even this is doubtful. But not only are these Orthodox worshippers themselves of undoubted Albanian language and sentiment; their Church itself is Albanian. Since 1937, when the Patriarch declared the Albanian national Church autocephalous, the Orthodox Albanians have had Albanian priests and an Albanian liturgy.

There was once a lull in the Greek ambition to take territory which is not ethnically Greek; this was in 1926, when General Pangalos was Dictator in Greece. Pangalos, being himself an Epirote, understood perfectly the difference between an Albanian and a Greek, and had no desire to retain Albanian-inhabited territory; he therefore voluntarily ceded to Albania sixteen Albanian villages in the district of Korea. This extraordinary example of just dealing, and of voluntary treaty revision by a more powerful in favour of a less powerful State, is unique. The Greeks thought Pangalos quite mad, and soon turned him out.

The genuine Greek minority in Albania, and the greed of the Greeks (or some of them) for Albanian territory, made a serious political difficulty a little while ago. The fear that the Greeks, when they and we are victorious in the present war, will seek to be rewarded with a large chunk of Albanian territory is all that prevented the Albanians from undertaking guerilla warfare on a serious scale against the Italians. The Albanians want their freedom; but they do

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not desire to rid themselves of the Italians merely to come under the Greeks, or to be partitioned between Greece and Yugoslavia. They were already practising passive resistance against the Italians, and giving them considerable difficulty; but if they were sure that Italy was the only enemy, they would have risen in earnest to destroy their oppressors. As the King of Albania said to me: "My people may not be very effective as a modern army, which is something new to them; but as guerilla fighters there are none better. They ought to be good at it, for they have been doing nothing else for centuries."

During the years of peace there was a further problem upon the other side of the frontier. When the boundary was finally drawn by an Inter-Allied Commission, after the last war, a large number of Albanians were left as a minority in Greece. These were for the most part Moslems, belonging to the province of Chameria, and known as Chameriotes, or Chamouriotes. In the year 1923 peace was restored between the Allied Powers and Turkey, and in the Treaty of Lausanne provision was made for the compulsory exchange of the Turkish minorities in Greece and the Greek minority in Turkey. Unfortunately, however, the agreement did not describe these people as "Greeks" and "Turks", but as "Christians" and "Moslems"; the Greek authorities, therefore, proceeded to deport to Turkey the Albanian Chamouriotes, who happened to be Moslems. This was most unfair on the people transported, and on Albania; but although many complaints were made, little could be done about it. The Albanian minority in Greece has thus been seriously depleted.

With regard to the future, the King of Albania would like to see the frontier between Albania and Greece delimited according to the results of an impartially supervised plebiscite. I asked him whether he thought that, after the frontier was drawn, it would be beneficial to effect an exchange of minorities, and he expressed himself as favourable to this idea, notwithstanding the lands which would be evacuated by the Albanian minority in Greece are, he said, richer than those to be vacated by the Greek minority in Albania.

A problem on a numerically far larger scale is presented by

the Albanian minority in Yugoslavia. The population of Albania itself is just over one million; but the Albanian minority in Yugoslavia is variously given as threequarters of a million (the Albanian figure) and (the Yugoslav version) about one half of that number. To have as much as one sixth, or possibly even one third, of one's people subject to a neighbouring State is a very serious matter for a poverty-stricken nation, struggling into independent life. The Albanians in Yugoslavia for the most part live in compact Albanian areas, not far from the frontier. Partly in solid blocks of villages, partly intermixed with the Serbs, Albanians are to be found all the way round the frontier from Montenegro to Bitolj (Monastir). On the North Albanian Alps, which protrude from the north-eastern corner of Albania, at Plav, Djakova, Gusinje; at Prizren, and on the Plain of Kossovo (all these north of the Sar Planina); in the villages between Tetovo and Skophje; on the Drin near Dibra (or Debar); in Bitolj itself; all round the frontier there are these Albanians, variously assessed at 300,000 or 700,000 souls. Some of their territory was nibbled off by Montenegro half a century ago; some fell to Serbia in the Balkan wars; some, again, only contains Albanians at all because of the settlement promoted by Abdul Hamid.

The Albanians have no Yugoslav minority; they are purely sufferers from this cutting off of a section of their folk, and from the harsh treatment accorded to that section by the Serbs. The Albanians complained, in the 'twenties of this century, that the Yugoslav Agrarian Reform was carried out in a manner prejudicial to the Albanian minority. Big estates were to be split up among the peasants, and every big farm lost some of its land. The local officials, in carrying out the division, are alleged to have discriminated against Albanians by confiscating the *central* part of the farm, thus destroying the farmer's privacy in his farmhouse, and leaving him with two dissevered blocks of land at a distance from each other. More lately, the complaint has been that the Yugoslavs are too prone to ship off inconvenient minorities to Turkey, without giving them a chance to migrate (if leave they must) to Albania. It may well be that in the future the borders and the minorities of Albania are

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going to provide us with problems almost as acute and complicated as those of Macedonia! In order to do justice to Albania, her frontier needs considerable rectification; but it is impossible to transfer to her *all* the Albanian-inhabited districts, without severing the natural communications between Yugoslav Macedonia (the Banovina of the Vardar) and Bosnia.

The Albanian Government naturally wished to bring back its unredeemed peoples to Albania; but to provide them with a livelihood in a poor country is a problem not without difficulties. If, in addition, the persons to be repatriated (whether from Yugoslavia or Greece) have been sent off to Turkey, the cost of transporting them is enormous. In 1927 the Turkish Government issued a decree, sensible enough from its own point of view, but awkward for Albania; for it ordered that the Albanians living in Turkey must decide once and for all whether to be Albanians or Turks. If they liked to become Turkish, they could abandon any minority rights or claims, and accept Turcification; if they wanted to retain their Albanian national life, they must leave Turkey. Naturally, Albania could not afford the money to repatriate in a hurry all the Albanians who might have been willing to be repatriated; many Albanians were thus lost. Had more money been available, a larger number could have been repatriated, at a cost of about £100 Per head.

In 1925 the Albanians made efforts to provide an attractive existence for returning migrants. Five acres of land were to be found for each returning family, besides cattle and implements. The execution of this law was much hampered by corruption and the opposition of landowners, who feared an "Agrarian Reform"; so in the following year President Zogu (as he then was) appointed a special Commission to handle the business. Mrs. Pennington, an English lady who lived at Durazzo and interested herself in these refugees, was made a member of the Commission. Only too frequently, however, the persons who presented themselves to the Commission as refugees were fugitives from Yugoslav justice, rather than from national oppression. The machinery rightly set up for re-settling genuine nationalist immigrants sometimes served as

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cover for rogues who had gone to Yugoslavia on a killing expedition, perhaps to execute the private vengeance of an Albanian politician, and who wanted on their return to be set up for life.

These minority problems have an acute bearing on international affairs. Albania needs her sons; Yugoslavs and Albanians cannot be friends while this grievance subsists between them; and the obvious case for frontier rectification might well have furnished Italy with an excuse (had she needed one) to claim such rectification on behalf of her protégé. Moreover, these questions of frontier revision are quite likely to be among the tiresome and dangerous items in the agenda of the next Peace Conference.



Typical Albanian peasants; once brigands.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Birth of a State

WE left the story of Albania, at the end of Chapter One, on November 12th 1912, when a Congress at Valona had proclaimed Albanian independence. The proclamation was an act of faith, and took some years to transform into fact. Technically, Albania may be said to have reached statehood when she was admitted to the League of Nations in 1920; but it was the end of 1924 before she began to enjoy a Government so stable that it lasted for fourteen years. Poverty and lack of communications presented fearful difficulties to the state-builder, and the necessity of obtaining capital to develop the country exposed the Albanians to the risk of selling their independence for pocket-money.

At the time of the Balkan Wars, Albania was lucky enough to find two important Powers which definitely desired an Albanian State—or, at least, to prevent Northern Albania from falling into the hands of the Serbs, or Southern Albania into those of the Greeks. Italy wanted to exclude Serbia from the Adriatic and Greece from the Strait of Otranto; Austria-Hungary desired to keep Serbia landlocked. Neither Power had the slightest genuine consideration for the aspirations of the Albanians; but it suited their convenience to set up an independent Albania. Other Powers had no interest to prevent such a project; and in the end the Concert of the Powers co-operated in the establishment of the Principality. They decided, moreover, to make Scutari the first town to be rescued from the two small Serbian States.

At the end of 1912 and the beginning of 1913 the representatives of the Balkan Alliance were assembled in London, together with the delegate of Turkey, to try to agree upon a peace settlement, thus terminating the First Balkan War. The field campaigns were over, but Adrianople and Scutari were still besieged. Parallel with the

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Peace Conference of belligerents, there sat a Conference of Ambassadors of the Great Powers, also in London, to decide what kind of a peace the small States should be allowed to make. This Conference of Ambassadors resolved upon the setting up of an independent Albania. In accordance with its decision, an international naval squadron was sent to the Adriatic to induce the Serbs to retire from the Albanian coast, which they had reached at Durazzo and Alessio, and to persuade the Montenegrins and Serbs to desist from the siege of Scutari; all this territory was to belong to Albania. The plan of the Balkan Alliance had been to give Scutari to Montenegro and a generous chunk of Northern Albania to Serbia. This was to be prevented.

The Turkish garrison in Scutari was commanded (after the murder of Hassan Riza Pasha) by Essad Bey Toptani, who had no idea what was going on outside his besieged fortress. Some Turkish officers were let through the Montenegrin lines, and so gave him some information. Meanwhile, the Montenegrins, in spite of orders to raise the siege, conveyed to them by Admiral Sir Cecil Burney, continued their operations. They captured Mount Tarabosh, overlooking the town, and eventually Essad was induced to capitulate; he marched his garrison out with the honours of war, and the Montenegrins occupied Scutari. Further pressure from the Concert induced the Montenegrins to evacuate the town, which was then occupied by a force of bluejackets and Marines from the international squadron.

Meanwhile, in the south of Albania, Ismail Kemal Bey, an Albanian "bien vu" by the Turkish Government, had established a provisional Government in Valona, with the assistance of another International Commission. Further to the south, there was an irruption of Greek irregulars, supporting a small clique of Greek-speaking local business men, and endeavouring by fire and sword to prove the ethnic character of Northern Epirus.

Upon the departure of the Serbs from Northern and Central Albania, Essad Bey Toptani, the Albanian General who had commanded at Scutari, established his own rule in and around Durazzo.

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His family had been princes in that region a few centuries earlier, and he was still pursuing his own ambition to become Prince of Albania. However, the Great Powers proceeded to choose Prince William of Wied, a nephew of the then Queen of Romania (Carmen Sylva) and a relative of Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands. In March 1914 Wied arrived at Durazzo and essayed the thankless and impossible task of establishing his rule. His principal Minister was Essad, who quarrelled alternately with the Prince, the Prince's Dutch officers, and the Austrians, upon whose support the whole enterprise depended. On one occasion Prince William was obliged to turn his artillery upon Essad's house, and shell him into submission. The whole Albanian artillery force, consisting of two guns, was used in this operation. Eventually Madame Essad hung a sheet out of a window in token of surrender. Finally, the Austrians grew tired of Essad, and shipped him off to Italy.

Upon Essad's departure the Moslems rebelled against the Christian "Mbret" (Prince or King) and fought against the Catholic Mirditi. At this juncture the Great War broke out, and the Concert of the Powers, which had put William where he was, split irretrievably. The Prince found his position quite impossible, and left for Germany, in whose army he fought in the Great War. In the hope of an eventual restoration, he painstakingly learnt Albanian.

Albania had now an assortment of local Governments, later replaced by various belligerent armies. Prenk Bib Doda, the chief of the Mirditi, whom Abdul Hamid had exiled thirty years earlier, had come back, and was now ruling his own people without much reference to anybody else. Ismail tried to carry on in the south. After the defeat of the Serbs by the Austrians, the Serbian army marched through Albania, and was embarked for Corfu. After the Serbs came the Austrians, who occupied the north and centre of the country. The Italians occupied Valona, across the Strait of Otranto; the Greeks still held part of the south; to check the Italians and the Greeks, a French force from the Salonika army went to Korea, where it protested its support for Albanian independence. Eventually, the Austrians departed, and the Allies pushed up the Vardar

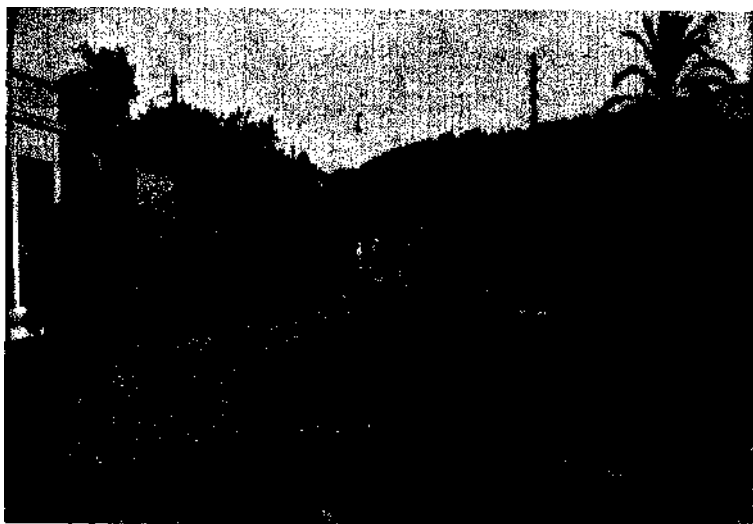
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Valley. The Peace Conference at Paris resumed the interrupted task of providing for Albania's future. The principal delegate from Albania was Mehdi Frasheri, who was afterwards Prime Minister. That old adventurer, Essad, turned up to see what he could get out of the Conference; but it was his last adventure, for while in Paris he was assassinated; so ended an intriguer and murderer.

It was now that Italy repented of her action in 1913, when she had sponsored Albanian independence; for, with no delicately balanced Concert of the Powers, no watchful and hostile Austria-Hungary to be placated, and as a member of a victorious alliance, she might reasonably hope to get Albania for herself. At first she tried to obtain a Protectorate over Albania; when this was not accepted, she thought to buy off the objections of Greece and Yugoslavia by giving them Korea and Scutari respectively, to annex Valona outright, and to receive a League of Nations Mandate over the rest of the country. In fact, the Peace Conference took a decision in this sense; but the Conference of Ambassadors was left to work out the details, and in the meantime the situation had changed.

Many people think that an Italian Protectorate or Mandate would not have been at all a bad solution. Albania had not yet given evidence of being able of itself to unite in obedience to a central Government. Money needed to be spent upon development, and whatever country put up the money would naturally wish for political influence. But the fact is that the Albanians are not to be regarded as "natives", or as some savage people, utterly foreign to Europe. Albania is indeed backward, but many individual Albanians have shown great aptitude for statesmanship, and it is almost entirely a question of money to make the Albanian governing class into real Europeans (as some of its members undoubtedly already are) in their behaviour and mentality. Moreover, there is no very evident superiority, except in education, of the Italian over the Albanian.

At this point in the story the Albanians themselves took a hand, and soon showed that they had no wish to be governed by Italy. They assembled a Congress at Lushnija (subsequently moving it



Early morning scene: Valona.



Artistic gaiters: children at
Santi Quaranta.

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down to Tirana) and emphatically repudiated the Italian Mandate. Their view was that they had got rid of the Turkish oppressor for some better purpose than to accept another foreign ruler. Being juridically a Principality without a Prince, they appointed four Regents: two Moslems, one Orthodox Christian and one Catholic. Meanwhile, a young tribal chieftain, Ahmed Bey Zogu, of whom we shall have a great deal to say later on, kept a force of his Mati tribesmen in the field, and protected the Congress from interruption. He also fought the Italians near Valona, and the Italians could make so little headway against him that, in disgust, and in any case thoroughly tired of the war (as were the soldiers of most of the belligerents by this time) they withdrew altogether from Valona, holding only the little island of Saseno, just outside Valona harbour. Albania was now "de facto" independent, for there were no foreign troops in her territory. Friends of Albania, such as Lord Cecil, Colonel Aubrey Herbert, Miss Durham, and the Balkan Committee, agitated for the "de jure" recognition of Albania as an independent State; and in December 1920 Albania was formally admitted to membership of the League of Nations.

It is interesting to contrast this defeatist gesture of Italy, after all she had contrived for the purpose of obtaining possession of Albania, and particularly of Valona, with the pains she was subsequently to take to recover her lost foothold, and eventually to seize the whole country. Part of the explanation is war-weariness; the unwillingness to wage a serious campaign against Ahmed Bey Zogu. Signor Nitti, however, writing in exile in Paris in 1927, gave another explanation for his retreat. When in office (he explained) he had gone carefully into the question of colonising Albania with Italian settlers. His experts advised him that marshes and malaria rendered the country unsuitable for Italian settlement; a prohibitive expenditure of capital would be needed for the draining of the marshes and the planting of settlers. On the basis of this advice, Nitti abandoned the idea of colonisation; and if the country was not intrinsically worth having, there was little point in continuing the war against Ahmed Bey Zogu, and incurring thereby the undying hostility both of the

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Albanians and of the Yugoslavs. Nitti was not to know that the Rockefeller Institute would step in and drain some of these marshes, reducing the incidence of malaria between 1928 and 1935 from 70 per cent, to 26 per cent.

Italy had been disappointed of her Mandate; but she secured for herself a reversionary interest in Albania, should the Albanians prove incapable of maintaining their own independence. Nothing that had yet occurred had given any evidence of their ability in this respect, and disunity had hitherto been endemic. The four Great Powers on the League of Nations Council—that is to say, Italy, Great Britain, France and Japan—therefore entered into an agreement among themselves, pledging in advance the attitude which they would take up in the League Council, if ever that body were seized of a threat to Albanian independence. In such a case, it would be the duty of the Council to restore such independence; and the four Powers undertook to recommend that *Italy* be entrusted with the task of carrying out this duty, on behalf of the League. In effect, Italy obtained a contingent Mandate over Albania, in case the Albanian leaders failed to make a success of their State.

It is, of course, true that this agreement of the four Powers in no way bound Albania herself, as she was not a party to it. Nor did it technically bind the Council of the League; but if the four Great Powers had all voted for a certain course of action, there was (to put it at its lowest) a high degree of probability that such course would in fact be adopted by the Council. Thus, the four Powers were in fact deciding the fate of Albania. Their action may not have been in the spirit of the League, but it followed respectable pre-war diplomatic precedent; it was a sop to the pride of Italy, and a recognition of her perfectly genuine interest (from a geographical point of view) in the territory just across the Strait of Otranto.

One State was particularly dissatisfied with Italy's special position in Albania; this was Yugoslavia. If Albania were to fall under Italian control it would give Italy a strategic outwork or bridge-head, menacing Yugoslavia's flank. Moreover, the Albanian

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minority in Yugoslavia, so situated as to dig deeply into the waist of the Yugoslav Kingdom, might be claimed by Italy on behalf of her protegee. The Yugoslavs were already at loggerheads with Italy over their common frontier at the head of the Adriatic; but the question of Fiume was, after all, of special concern to the Croats and the Slovenes rather than to the Serbs; while an Italian-controlled Albania threatened Serbia itself. As the Triune Kingdom was preponderantly controlled by the Serbs, the Albanian question touched most closely the interests of the men who were governing the country. Italy and Yugoslavia, therefore, occupied the next few years in an elaborate game of diplomatic bickering over Albania, supporting rival Albanian factions, and generally interfering in Albanian affairs, until the longer purse of Italy eventually enabled her to prevail.

The Premier of Albania in 1920, under the Regency of four men established by the Lushnija Congress, was Hassan Bey Prishtina. As his name implies, Hassan came from Prishtina, in one of the Albanian districts belonging to the Yugoslav Kingdom. Hassan was (or had recently been) President of the so-called "Kosovo Committee", whose object was to secure the transfer of these Albanian-inhabited districts to Albania. The Serbs clung to this district, partly on strategic grounds, and partly for sentimental reasons, since Kosovo was the piece of old Serbian territory on which the Serbian Prince Lazar had fought the fatal Battle of Kosovo, in which mediaeval Serbia was crushed by the Turks. An association such as the Kosovo Committee could mean only one thing in the Balkans; an organisation of comitadjis, secretly directed, and engaged in smuggling arms, assassinating opponents, and promoting insurrection. The Serbs were already troubled by the I.M.R.O., operating from Bulgarian territory to foment trouble in Yugoslav Macedonia; another terrorist gang, working from Albania, was too much; that its leader should be Prime Minister of Albania was quite intolerable. The Yugoslavs, therefore, set themselves to secure Hassan's resignation; they were successful, and Hassan Prishtina went into exile. For years he was the leader of a section of highly discontented

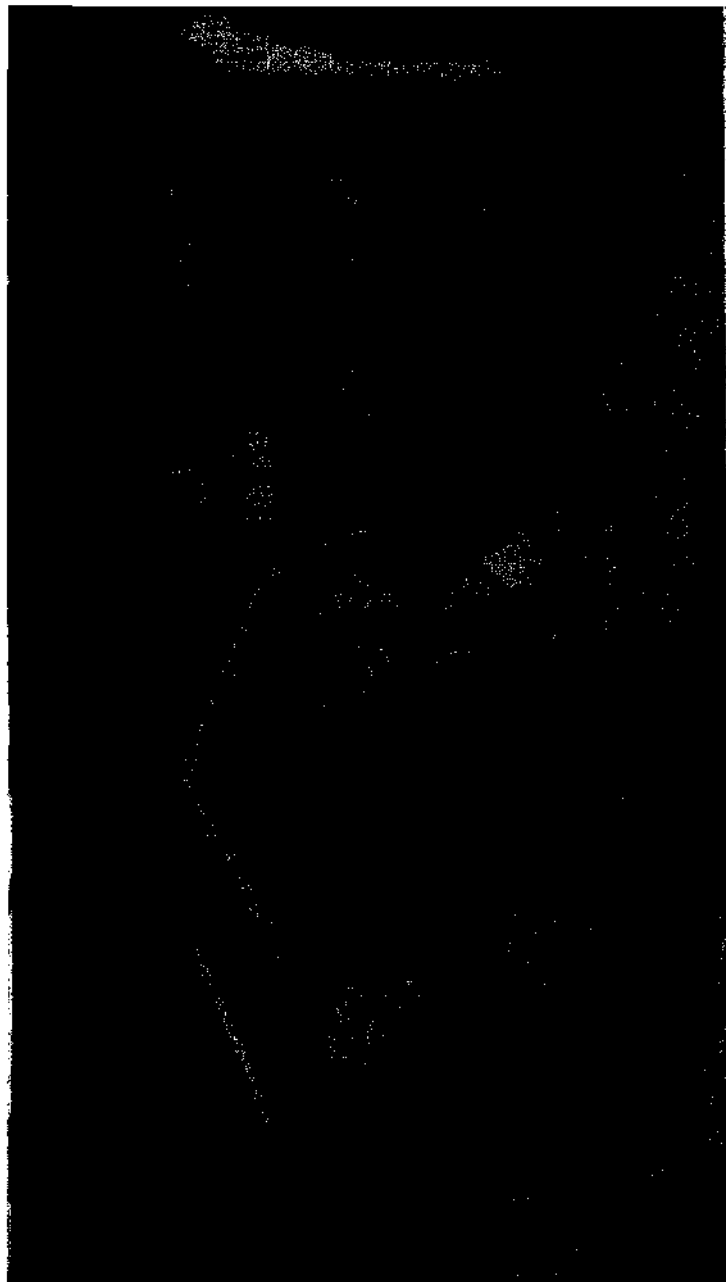
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Albanian exiles, until eventually he was assassinated, some years later, at Salonika.

The Government of Albania was now predominantly Moslem, and in 1921 the Catholic Mirditi raised a rebellion. The Yugoslavs, who were probably privy to the movement, sent troops to its support. The frontier had not yet been demarcated, and there was a chance of altering it to the advantage of Yugoslavia. Mr. Lloyd George, however, sent an open telegram to the Council of the League of Nations, inviting it to consider whether economic sanctions should not be employed against Yugoslavia, if she continued to maintain invading troops upon Albanian soil. The Yugoslavs withdrew their troops in some haste; as Pasic confessed afterwards, Yugoslavia could not at that time face the risk of an economic blockade.

In 1922 there was a coup at Tirana, and for a short time the rebels were in control of the capital. However, there was already some sort of a body of men doing administrative jobs—it would perhaps be too much to call it a Civil Service—and these people sabotaged the plot by staging a sort of sit-down strike. Meanwhile, young Ahmed Bey Zogu (who had become Minister of the Interior, at the age of 27) was the only member of the Government who had not fled. He fought the rebels for fifteen hours, after which the British Minister was able to negotiate the withdrawal of the insurgents. The Government returned to Tirana, except for the Premier, who had had enough. Ahmed Bey Zogu became Prime Minister.

Meanwhile, Ahmed Bey Zogu had become betrothed to the daughter of a wealthy landowner from just south of Elbasan, named Shefket Bey Vrlaci. This engagement was still in being, and Ahmed's prospective father-in-law was his political ally. Ahmed held a general election in 1923, but at that time he had not that control of the machinery of government, or for that matter of the country generally, that he afterwards obtained; he was defeated, and had to resign the Premiership. He put in his father-in-law as his successor.



The old Bridge at Pond 115

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Those who did not like Zogu found that Shefqet was only a substitute for the former Premier; they opposed him, to the point when Zogu was obliged to call for the armed support of the Moslems, and some fighting occurred. Zogu was defeated, and found it necessary to leave the country. The two Moslem regents departed with Zogu, and as there happened to be a vacancy in the Catholic seat on the Regency, the Orthodox Regent was left as the only repository of legal authority. He nominated as Prime Minister the Orthodox Bishop of Durazzo, Monseigneur Fan Noli.

In terms of culture, as distinct from politics, Bishop Fan Noli is the greatest living Albanian. He came from the south of the country, was educated at Harvard, and had been consecrated a Bishop in Greece. It is reported that when the Greek army entered Korea in November 1940, the inhabitants raised cheers for the exiled Bishop. Fan Noli was an enlightened man, but in too much of a hurry. Being American-trained, he wanted to improve Albania beyond all knowing. One of his projects was a land reform, with the object of distributing parts of the estates of the big landowners among the peasantry. His incautious talk upon this subject alienated the Beys or landowners of the South, who were the only class in Albania that enjoyed even moderate affluence. The Bishop ruled for some six months, and adequately represented his country at the Assembly of the League of Nations. Then he was overthrown, and has not since returned to Albania.

Ahmed Bey Zogu had spent the six months of his exile in Belgrade, and had assured himself of Yugoslav aid. A few days before Christmas 1924, he returned to Albania at the head of a force of Albanian exiles, White Russians (survivors of Wrangel's armies, now living at Belgrade as refugees) and Serbian soldiers in mufti; the faithful Mati clansmen at once joined his standard, and he re-entered Tirana in triumph on Christmas Eve.

Bishop Fan Noli had leant upon the Italians; Zogu was the protege of the Yugoslavs. The Italians, however, did not feel much alarm at the change of regime, for they knew that Zogu would require money, and this they could supply and the Yugoslavs

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could not. Moreover, Zogu had taken the precaution of keeping a foot in each camp. While he himself was at Belgrade, obtaining Yugoslav support, his ally Shefqet Bey Vrlaci was in Rome, enlisting Italian sympathy for their faction.

Soon after his return to Albania, Zogu held a Constituent Assembly, which declared the abolition of the Regency and the substitution for it of an Albanian Republic. Under the new constitution Zogu was President, and had power to nominate one-third of the members of the State Council, which prepared bills for the Legislature. As soon as he had got well into the saddle, and had reduced the practice of electioneering to an art, he was also able to secure that the other members of the State Council and the members of the Legislature should also be persons in whom he could have confidence.

Thus, in January 1925 there was established a single State of Albania, sufficiently stable to ensure the authority of Zogu for fourteen years, and only at last overwhelmed by the arrival of the Italian army, supported by a host of aeroplanes. Probably January 1925 is the date at which one can first truthfully say that an Albanian State really existed, not on paper but in fact.

CHAPTER FIVE

The House of Zog

AHMED BEY ZOGU, elected President of the Albanian Republic in January 1925, and King of the Albanians in September 1928, has become the real leader of the Albanian people. His career, particularly before he attained supreme power, has been one of truly Balkan excitement.

Zogu's father was the Chief of the Mati, a Moslem tribe in North Central Albania. The chief village of the Mati is Burrel, some fifteen miles north of Tirana, and the tribe occupies an important strategic position on the River Mati, which is crossed lower down by the main road from Tirana to Scutari. Ahmed was his father's second son, his elder brother Xhelal (Djelal) being destined for the succession; when their father died, Xhelal duly succeeded. Ahmed, who was nine years old at that time, was hastily removed to Constantinople, in case of accidents. In societies of a somewhat backward and Oriental tradition, younger brothers are apt to be regarded as a danger to their elders; for which reason they themselves are exposed to precautionary measures. Hence Ahmed's departure to Turkey.

In turbulent times, such as the years before the Balkan Wars, strength is required in a ruler. Chief Xhelal was indolent and fond of feminine company; he proved an ineffective ruler, and his tribesmen began to suspect that he was selling them to the Serbs. The Mati therefore deposed him, and sent to Constantinople for Ahmed, who was at this time sixteen years old. Ahmed thus succeeded to the headship of the clan, and his brother has lived quietly as a private person ever since.

During the Great War the Mati country was in Austrian occupation. The Austrians sought the friendship of the Mati Chief,

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and got him to fight on their side. He was sent for a visit to Vienna, and was given the rank of Colonel in the Austro-Hungarian army. When the war ended he returned to Albania, and acted as watchdog for the National Congress at Lushnija and the Government at Tirana. We have already seen how he defended his colleagues against all comers, holding in turn the appointments of Commander-in-Chief, Minister of the Interior, and Prime Minister. After a period of exile in Yugoslavia, he returned, to become President of the Albanian Republic.

Hitherto, rebellions had been at least annual; President Zogu managed to stave off a rising for nearly two years. In November 1926 there was a serious revolt in the North, probably through the contriving of Italy. The rebels marched on Scutari, and captured the Commandant of the Scutari Gendarmerie, outside the city; but they contented themselves with tearing off his badges, and then let him go. The recent beginnings of modernisation, however, now stood Zogu in good stead, for he was informed of the situation by a new method—the telephone. By telephone Zogu replied, appointing a new Commandant, one Galo Bey Bushati, a member of an old family which had ruled Scutari as vassals of the Turks from 1760 until 1829. Bushati made an energetic sortie, and pushed the rebels back some five miles from the city, which they had very nearly captured. After this, several of the smaller northern tribes joined in the rebellion; but the important Mirditi remained faithful to the Government. Zogu was able to rush 12,000 troops of various kinds to the affected area.

Zogu's regular troops, plus the Mirditi and Mati and other loyal tribes, sufficed to break the rebellion; but Zogu felt he had had a close call, and the punishment of the rebel districts was severe. For this task the President employed a hardened politician, Musa Yuka, who was Minister of the Interior. Yuka hanged a Roman Catholic priest in the market-place of Scutari, put a number of people in prison, and burnt some of the rebel villages. For some months the Government, though unloved, was wholesomely feared in the Scutari district. In the following year the President took the

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northern people back into relative favour by paying a State visit to the town.

The aims of the rebellion were somewhat confused. Probably all sorts of motives contributed: the chance of a good fight; the inducements held out by Italy; annoyance at the recent attempt to suppress brigandage, and the threat of Musa Yuka to disarm the tribesmen. Economic distress also no doubt played a part, for Scutari had once been the centre of a Turkish garrison, and thought it ought to have been compensated for the loss of this source of income by being made the capital of Albania, instead of a mere provincial town. One of the supporters of the rebellion was Hassan Bey Prishtina, the 1920 Premier whose removal the Yugoslavs had procured; this fact lends colour to the story that Italy was privy to the rising. The ostensible leader of the rising, Loro Tzaka, announced that he wished to reorganise Albania as a Federal State, of which the North, the Centre and the South would be the components.

Macchiavelli laid down as a maxim for princes that they should carry out acts of repression through a deputy, but themselves assume responsibility for acts likely to be popular. President Zogu faithfully carried out this precept, for Musa Yuka punished the Scutari district, and Musa Yuka was then (temporarily) dropped. The President himself paid the visit to Scutari which was to restore the popularity of the Government. Thus, from November 1926 until February, Musa Yuka settled the rebellion; then he was moved from the Ministry of the Interior to that of Public Works. Another member of the clique, Abdurrahman Dibra, became Minister of the Interior. In September 1927 the President went to Scutari, stayed for a fortnight in an official villa built with public money, and held a review of the army and the Gendarmerie. The policy of appeasement was not unaccompanied by a display of the power of the Government.

Upon his return to Tirana, Zogu opened a new session of Parliament, and took further steps to appease the Catholics—who, it will be remembered, Hved in the North. He announced his intention of concluding a Concordat with the Vatican; this never materialised, but possibly the promise of it was pleasing to the

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Catholics. In October a general amnesty was announced, Bishop Fan Noli and Hassan Prishtina being excepted. Meanwhile, Musa Yuka was dropped out of the Cabinet, and was joined out in the cold by Abdurrahman Dibra in May 1928.

The rebellion of November 1926 was the last serious rising in Albania. In later years there were one or two slight affairs, but nothing on the scale of former rebellions. Ahmed Bey Zogu had completely established his own power, and the time had come in 1928 to perpetuate his authority by transforming the Republic into a monarchy. President Zogu was to be metamorphosed into King Zog. From the time of his assumption of the royal dignity, the form "Zogu" was dropped and "Zog" was used instead. Henceforth, therefore, we shall no longer speak of Zogu, but of Zog.

The change-over to monarchy had long been rumoured. In August 1928 a general election was held; but the new Parliament was to be a Constituent Assembly, to propose changes in the Constitution. The President had by now mastered the technique of elections, and the Assembly was composed of loyal men. Pandeli Evangheli, an old Premier of 1921, destined to be Premier again under Zog, was elected President of the Assembly, and the Assembly voted an address to the President, praying him to assume the title of Mbret, or King. The President acceded to their request, and on 2nd September he took the oath as King. The Assembly voted the necessary changes in the Constitution, and the Republic was no more. The short-lived Mbret of 1914, William of Wied, announced that he reserved his rights!

Zog's "popular" election to the throne was brought about by ingenious means. Zog was sufficiently popular, and doubtless many Albanians preferred that their ruler should be a King; the official view was that Albanians perfectly understand what is meant by "Mbret", but have no conception of such a functionary as a President. Zog, anyway, seems to have thought that his prestige would be greater and his position stronger. He therefore sounded Italy and other Powers, whose replies indicated that they saw no objection to the change, provided it were desired by the Albanian people.

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Zog put himself to great pains to show, by means of demonstrations and messages from all over the country, that he was assuming the purple in response to a strongly-felt and widespread desire on the part of his people. He soon produced the required evidence!

Demonstrations at Durazzo, Tirana and other centres were quite easy to arrange. The authorities just put up notices, giving the necessary instructions, and, to ensure that it was all quite spontaneous, omitted to append any signatures. Telegrams from all parts of the country were despatched by supporters of Zog, who went to the desired localities for this purpose. The only difficulty was to secure the assent of the Catholic chiefs of the North, who did not much like the idea of a Moslem King. These were invited to Scutari and held for a few days, practically as prisoners; after which they were asked to attach their thumb-marks (which served the illiterate for signatures) to a document, the purport of which was only vaguely explained. The documents, duly witnessed, arrived at Tirana, and were found to be petitions to the President to assume the Kingship. The chiefs went home, and doubtless learned later on that they had made themselves responsible for the new monarchy!

The object of these manoeuvres was not to swindle a vehemently republican nation—probably most people did not care one way or the other, and many were quite willing to please Zog—but to keep up appearances vis-a-vis foreign countries. The change was really effected by the simple use of governmental authority, and there was no necessity to procure popular assent, honestly or otherwise, so far as the Albanians were concerned.

It had been said, before Zog became King, that the upkeep of a monarch would be more costly than the poverty-stricken State could afford. Zog took the opposite view. So far as royal guards are concerned, he needed guarding just as much when President as he would when King, for he had just as many political enemies, who could not displace him except by murder; or someone whose relations had been executed might conceive he had a mission to execute the blood-feud upon Zog. However, as President, Zog had worn expensive and showy uniforms; his full dress was white,

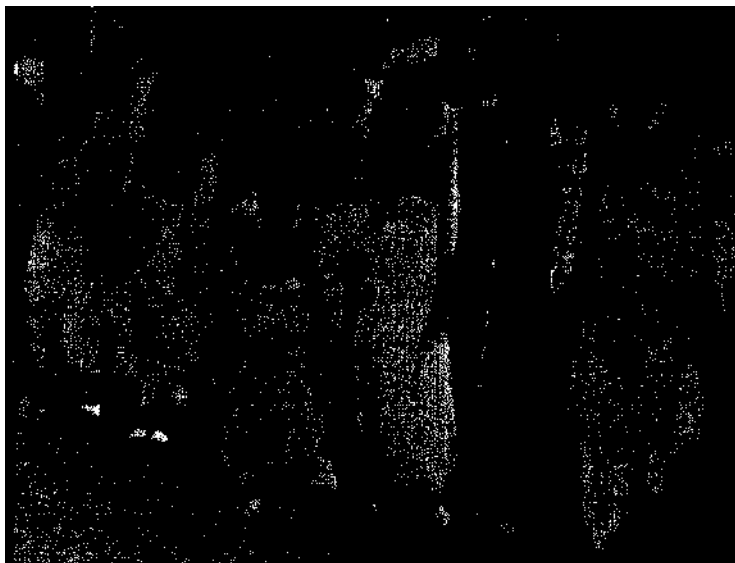
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with plentiful gold braiding, and a black cloak. "When I was President", he said naively to a British journalist, "I had to dress the part. But the poorest Albanian has a sense of royalty, and now that I am their Mbret it is not necessary to emphasise it in any way." The Exchequer was thus able to economise on the King's wardrobe!

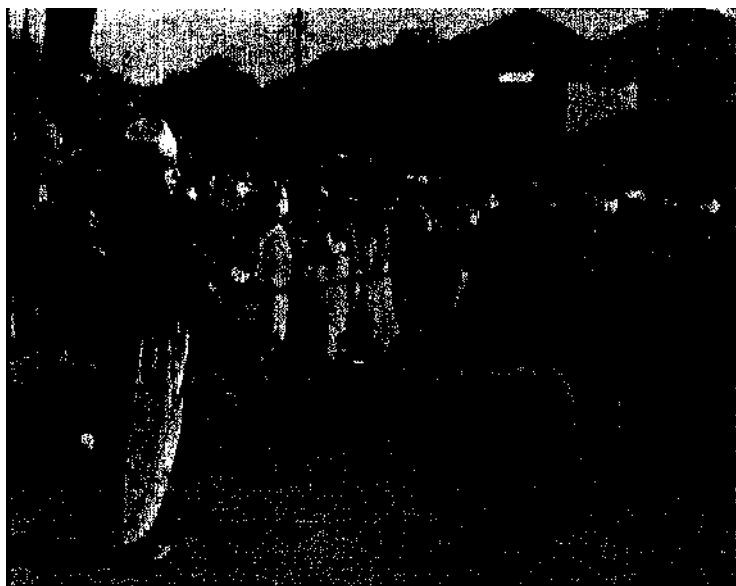
No coronation was ever held. To order a crown from Carrier would be both undignified and excessively expensive. A far better idea was to invest the King with the sword and helmet of the great Skanderbeg; but these were in a museum in Vienna, and could not be sold to Albania because they were already in pawn for one of Austria's loans. Moreover, a partially Moslem and partially Christian coronation ceremony would be difficult to arrange. The King very sensibly announced that he would not subject the finances of his country to the shocking extravagance of a coronation. The helmet of Skanderbeg, however, was adopted as the royal device or emblem, and was to be found on the buttons of the soldiers' uniforms; though the representation was quite unrecognisable to those who did not know what it was intended to be.

Another question was involved in the choice of a title. Zog chose to call himself "King of the Albanians", and thereby greatly annoyed the Yugoslavs, who, in a pique, withheld recognition of the title for several months. They would not have minded a "King of Albania"; but the "King of the Albanians" presumably claimed the allegiance of the half million or more Albanians living under Yugoslav sovereignty. The King doubtless realised what effect his choice of a title would have, but he accepted this disadvantage rather than offend his own subjects. In any case, the Yugoslavs were disappointed with Zog, because they had hoped to find in him an anti-Italian, and by now he was under the necessity of working with the Italians. As Yugoslavia was going through an internal crisis of her own just then, there was no danger that Zog would not "get away with it".

As King, Zog sought ostentatiously to place himself above all feuds and quarrels. He had now a succession of Prime Ministers, who could be made to take the blame for unpopular measures, and



Girls in national costume : King Zog's birthday.



Celebrating the King's birthday in Tirana.

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dismissed if necessary. He sought also to draw back to Albania the large number of exiled supporters of his own predecessors in power, for which purpose he published a wide amnesty, cancelling all death sentences, and pardoning all the exiles, save for a residue of about a hundred irreconcilables. These unpardoned enemies included three factions, supporting respectively the claims of Fan Noli, Hassan Bey Prishtina, and Dr. Klissura. Each faction published in exile its own dissident Albanian newspaper, and they leaned respectively upon Russia, Italy and Yugoslavia. Bishop Fan Noh himself, however, did not indulge in political activity, but devoted himself to literature.

A further move to put an end to all internal rivalries was seen in Zog's efforts to abolish the vendetta. He enacted a new Penal Code, based on that of Italy, and a new Civil Code, based on that of France; he was thus able to point out that the lawlessness which had made the vendetta necessary had now passed away. On many occasions he brought representatives of rival families into his presence and got them to shake hands, thus terminating their feud.

King Zog's personal comfort was notably restricted by the burdens of office. In former days he had been an active horseman, and had kept himself fit and slim. Now he lived in well-founded fear of assassination, necessitating precautions, and was practically confined to his own house. When he went to open Parliament, or to Durazzo for a seaside holiday, he moved between dense masses of troops, and by a route only decided upon at the last moment. His house at Durazzo was on the shore, and when he went swimming there were guards with rifles in boats on the sea. His indoor life at Tirana caused his health to deteriorate. He smoked too much, his throat became poisoned, and it was rumoured that he was dying. In January 1931 he paid a visit to Vienna, to undergo treatment. This was his first holiday outside his own country since his exile in 1924, and his first visit to Vienna since the Great War. He enjoyed himself thoroughly, visiting theatres and cabarets with a few attendants. His health was restored, but he nearly lost his life.

For the Albanian exiles, Zog's visit to Vienna furnished the first opportunity they had had for an attempt to get rid of the man

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who stood between them and a position of power in Albania. The Yugoslav Government (which some suspected of complicity in what followed) warned both the Albanian and the Austrian authorities that it had got wind of a plot. Perhaps the details were not sufficiently explicit; perhaps the Austrian police were inefficient. The assassins had postponed their plan for a few days upon learning that the King was to visit the Opera. The attempt took place when Zog was emerging from the Opera House, attended by his Court Chamberlain, Ekrem Libohova, and his Adjutant, Major Topallaj. In the offing was another Albanian officer, Sereggi. There were two assassins, but apparently only one of them actually fired at the King and his entourage.

The King descended the steps of the Opera House to his car, accompanied by Libohova and Topallaj. Libohova got into the car first, and the King was on the step, in the act of getting in. Topallaj stood near, waiting his turn to enter. Suddenly shots rang out. Topallaj, shot through the head from behind, fell dead. The King and Libohova drew their revolvers from their evening clothes, and blazed away in reply. The second assassin now approached the car on the other side, and Zog and Libohova, seeing that they would be caught between two fires, leapt out of the car and ran back up the steps to the shelter of the Opera portico. As they ran, Libohova was wounded by a bullet in the thigh; but the King was uninjured. Sereggi, a little in the background, saw the first assassin open fire, drew his own pistol, and fired back. An Austrian officer did the same. The bystanders, seeing a number of men letting off pistols, and not knowing which were the aggressors, seized indifferently the assassins, Sereggi, and the Austrian officer. The two latter were subsequently identified at the police station and released.

Some years afterwards I had a conversation in Tirana with Ekrem Libohova, then Foreign Minister of Albania. I indicated that I remembered how he had saved the King's life in Vienna. He passed this off with a deprecatory gesture, but I have no doubt that he was pleased. Even an Excellency likes to be recognised as being not merely a politician, but also a man.

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The two assassins afterwards stood their trial for the crime, and, as there was then no capital punishment in Austria, they received sentences of seven and three years respectively. These were reduced, and the principal assassin, who had slain Topallaj, was released after three years. He had to be smuggled carefully out of prison and across into Czechoslovakia, to give him a chance of escaping any relations of Topallaj who might be waiting outside the prison to execute the blood feud upon him. Apparently he had mistaken Topallaj for the King, and at first supposed that his crime had been successful. The Austrian authorities showed their anxiety at not having prevented the attempt by expelling from Vienna a score of Albanian *imigris*, including Hassan Bey Prishtina.

For thirteen years (from 1925 until 1938) Albania had a bachelor ruler. There was always speculation about his marriage. He was engaged for some time to the daughter of Shef ket Vrlaci, a landowner of the Elbasan district, and formerly Zogu's political ally. When Zog became King, the daughter of one of his subjects was hardly a suitable match for him, and the engagement was terminated. The marriage had long been postponed, pending the securing of husbands for all of the King's sisters; but when the betrothal was finally broken, Skefket Vrlaci took offence, and became an opponent of the King. He was subsequently implicated in a minor insurrection, and had to leave the country. He is now the Premier in the puppet Government of Albania, under the Italian regime.

King Zog was still a young man, and had he not been (and remained) a Moslem, he would have been an eligible husband for a Princess of one of the European dynasties. At one time he was credited with a desire to marry an Italian Princess, a daughter of King Victor Emmanuel; but the lady eventually married the King of Bulgaria. The official Albanian version of this story—and it is probably true—is that the Italian Government urged the match, in order to tie King Zog more closely to the Italian throne; but the King saw in the offer another shackle to the independence of his country, and refused. In these years, visiting journalists who enquired whether the King would marry were told that he was far too busy

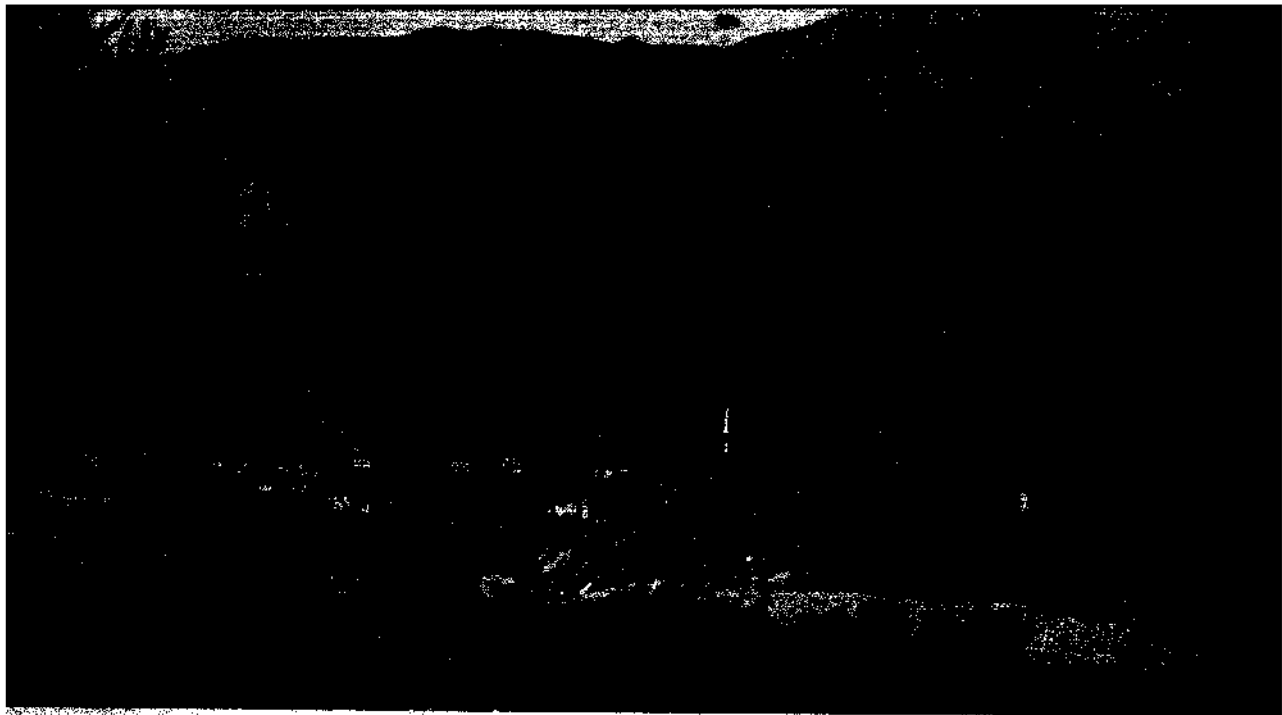
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to think of doing so. Eventually, at the end of January 1938, his engagement was announced to Countess Geraldine Apponyi, a young Hungarian lady of noble family. The marriage took place on 27th April of the same year.

In the ten years preceding the King's marriage the fate of Albania evidently depended upon his life. It was by no means clear whether, in the event of his death, any member of his family would be able to hold the throne. The safety of Albania required that he live in his palace, a large villa surrounded by high walls, and seldom stir beyond its walls. Incidentally, his marriage somewhat increased his safety; for although the genuine political assassin is not deterred by motives of chivalry, at least the vendetta killer, observing the Albanian code, would not kill in the presence of a woman.

Like Napoleon, and like another great Albanian of modern times, Atatürk, King Zog had a devoted mother. The monarchical Constitution ruled that this lady should be known as the Queen Mother; in 1934, at the age of 58, Queen Mother Sadie died, still urging her son to marry. The Constitution further provided that the King's brothers and sisters should be known as Princes and Princesses; no provision was made for titles to be borne by his nephews and nieces, but in practice these too are known as Princes and Princesses. No other titles having been envisaged, the rank of Bey, a survival from Turkish times, has no legal significance. The existing Beys—Moslem landowners—still used the title, as did others who were never entitled to be called Bey, but were thus addressed by the King as a species of courtesy or flattery. In fact, the title bore some resemblance to that of Esquire in England. Musa Yuka, for example, was not a genuine Bey, but was known as such; Shefqet Vërlaci is a genuine Bey, and so was Ismail Bey Kemal, whose Government at Valona at the beginning of the Great War is regarded by Albanians as having been the legal Government of Independent Albania at that time.

The King's elder brother, Prince Xhelal, whom he supplanted as Chief of the Mati, still lived in Albania. He was a mild gentleman, much addicted to marriage, but carefully abstaining from the



View of Premeti.

The House of Zog

dangerous game of politics. Although polygamy was forbidden by one of Zog's laws, the Prince continued to take a new wife every year. It is not clear whether the preceding wives were formally divorced, or whether, being the King's brother, the Prince merely ignored the law. Flatterers used to point to the Prince and his young son as probable future rulers of Albania; but the Prince would carefully assert to all such his inextinguishable faith (which proved well-founded) that the King would marry and have a son.

The King has also half a dozen sisters. One of these was married, some years ago, to Tseno Bey Kryziu, who represented Zog as Albanian Minister in Belgrade and Prague. While serving in Prague Tseno was assassinated, leaving a young son, known as Prince Tati. Until the King's marriage Prince Tati was an obvious heir to the throne; the King kept him at his side, gave him a motor-car to drive about in (he was then about ten years old) and took pains to be on excellent terms with him. The young Prince is now about fourteen years old.

The six Princesses lived in a villa opposite the Palace. Another of them was married; but her husband lived alone, and did not appear in public, being somewhat inclined to alcohol. This couple have two daughters, who lived with their mother and aunts, and used to be seen riding on horseback around Tirana, escorted by a party of guards in khaki uniforms. Both of them were sent to school at Ascot.

A third of the King's sisters married in 1936. Her marriage was a great event, for the bridegroom was a genuine Imperial Prince, a son of Sultan Abdul Hamid. Although the House of Othman no longer reigns, its standing among Moslem dynasties is somewhat that of the Habsburgs in Christian Europe. From a dynastic point of view, the marriage of Zog's sister to a son of the deceased Sultan-Caliph was an event; the Albanian King had joined the ranks of genuine royalty!

Albania paid somewhat dearly for this honour. To induce the Turkish Prince to accept a bride eight years older than himself, a handsome dowry was provided. This His Imperial Highness is

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reported to have taken forthwith to Monte Carlo and lost. Little dismayed, he returned to his brother-in-law's Court and endeavoured so to dazzle the King that he should obtain fresh subsidies.

Such was the House of Zog in 1938, when the King eventually decided to take to himself a bride. The lady of his choice was a kinswoman of the celebrated Count Apponyi, whose immense height, huge beaked nose, and little goatee beard made him such a conspicuous figure year after year in the Assembly of the League of Nations, until at last, at a great age, he died. The Countess's family was, like many other great families in post-war Europe, somewhat impoverished. She herself is talented and extremely beautiful, and has a complete mastery of several languages, including English, for she was born in the United States, and her mother is American.

The marriage is by no means a *mesalliance*, from either side. The Countess is well fitted to be a Queen, and represents the major aristocracy of Hungary. The King, on the other hand, as an hereditary tribal chieftain, is of the aristocracy of Albania, being somewhat analogous to one of the Scottish Dukes before the Union of Great Britain. The King of Albania is a handsome man in his forties; the Queen, a lady of great personal beauty.

The marriage ceremony might well have given rise to difficulties, since Queen Geraldine is a Roman Catholic, and her husband remains a Moslem. However, marriage is a civil affair in Moslem countries, and in fact the couple were married by the Speaker of the Albanian Parliament in the Royal Palace at Tirana. The King bought back for Queen Geraldine's family the estates which they had been compelled to sell, owing to the impoverishment of the last years.

The Albanian Kingdom now reached its highest point of success. The King appeared secure upon his throne; and in Holy Week of 1939 the Queen assured the continuance of the dynasty by giving birth to a son. Two days later, on Good Friday, the young State was murdered by its big ally. The King, accompanied by his wife and child, entered upon a new stage in his adventurous career.

CHAPTER SIX

Cutting the Coat

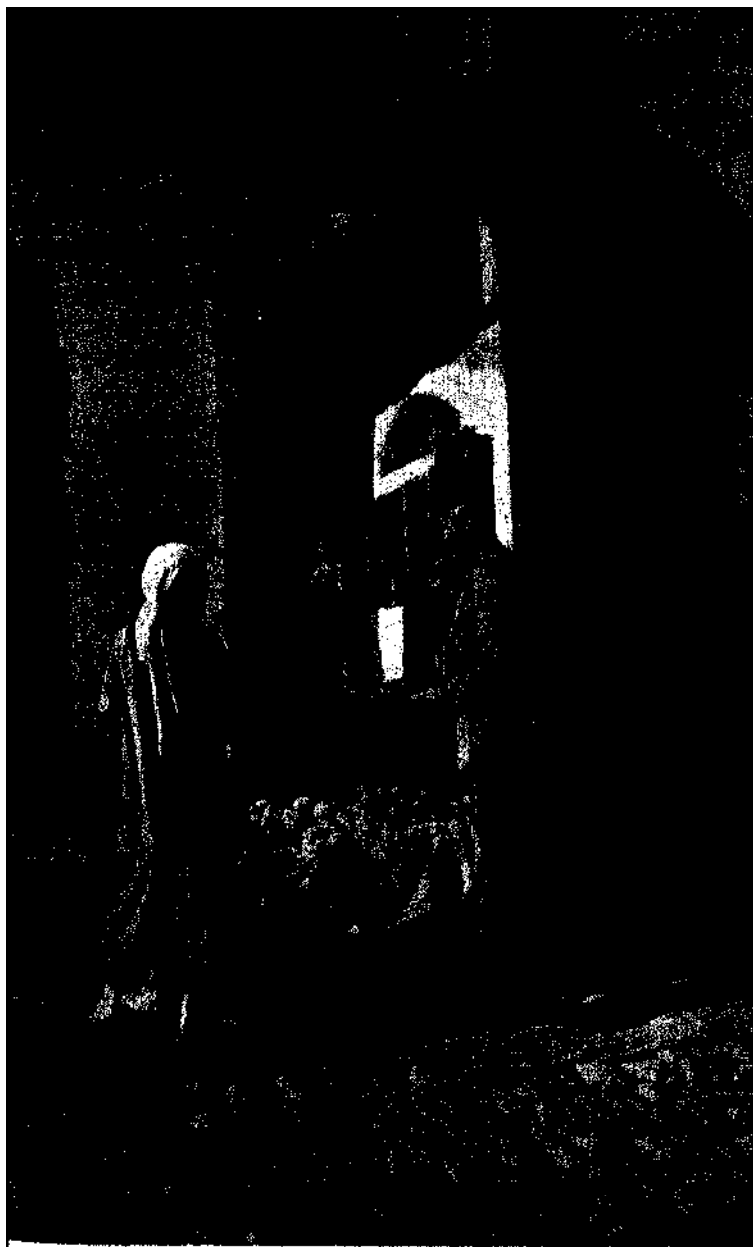
THE problem of Albania is essentially one of money. Granted sufficient external financial assistance, she can develop her country and educate her people; she can, in fact, modernise herself, and become established as a small but independent State. Unfortunately, however, money has not been forthcoming except from Italy, and Italy has proved to be an interested party in regard to Albania's future. No doubt the Italians were wise, if they wanted to see their money back, to insist upon a measure of control over the way in which their loans were spent; but one can hardly avoid the conclusion that Italian loans and subsidies were in the nature of ground-bait, designed expressly to tie the Albanians to the heels of Italy. The essential factor in the story of Albania from 1925, when she became really independent and began to consolidate herself, until ¹⁰³⁹ when she was annexed by Italy, is therefore the financial and political relationship which existed at any given time between Albania and Italy; the next two chapters will tell the story of Italo-Albanian relations. Meanwhile, however, it is necessary to preface the story of Italian "lira imperialism" by some particulars of the economic situation of Albania, her population, trade, products, industries, finances and general state of development. If economic facts are dull to the non-economist, that cannot be helped; the serious student should at least glance at this chapter, so as to know what the problem is all about; the more general reader can safely skip from here until the end of the chapter!

The general geographical shape and mountainous character of Albania have already been mentioned, and it will have been realised that the country is overwhelmingly agricultural. The total population included within the frontiers of the State was, according to the 1930 census, 1,003,068. Of these 30,806 lived in Tirana, and

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about 22,000 in Korea. There were then 2,000 Italian residents, including 245 who were in the service of the Albanian State. Residents of British nationality numbered 80; of these, the Legation staff, some ten Gendarmerie Inspectors, Mrs. Hasluck and Mrs. Pennington were natives of the British Isles. The national revenue came to some 18,000,000 gold francs, which worked out at about one guinea per head of the population. Foreign trade was on a somewhat small scale; exports in 1934 came to some 5½ million gold francs, of which 2 millions were olives and olive-oil, 1.9 millions cheese, hides and fish, and the remaining 1.6 millions included wheat, maize, tobacco, rice, hemp, beans, nuts and fruit.

One of the practical difficulties in the way of any Government which set about developing Albania was the paucity of communications. In all Albania there is no railway. Beside the road between Durazzo and Tirana one may behold the rusted rails of a light railway which the Austrians laid down for military purposes during the Great War; but this became disused, and little of it remains. For many years there was talk of a Durazzo-Tirana railway, and money was spent upon it, but in the end it was abandoned as quite unnecessary. The major means of communication is the roads constructed by the Italians; motor-buses run on some of them, and there are a few motor-cars. The surfaces are deplorable, the roads themselves are difficult and expensive to maintain. Part of the work of road-building was the bridging of innumerable torrents. The Italians constructed 30 large and 1,500 small bridges, mostly of steel. From the Italian point of view, the roads had a military significance, since it was envisaged that if Yugoslavia tried to invade Albania, the Italian-trained Albanian army would hold the prepared defensive positions until Italian reinforcements could be landed at Durazzo. To the central Government at Tirana the roads were also of the greatest importance, because King Zog could move troops, accompanied by wheeled transport and artillery, to any scene of rebellion, and get them there before the trouble had taken much of a hold. From the economic point of view, roads made trade possible; not only could the grower bring his produce more quickly to



A fruit-stall in Premeti.

Cutting the Coat

market, but he could get his stuff down to Durazzo or Valona for export abroad.

In a backward country like Albania, air-transport is much more important than it is in the better developed West of Europe. Many an Albanian who has never seen a motor-car or a steam-engine in his life will scarcely turn his head to notice a mail or passenger 'plane. A German company began air-transport in Albania soon after the War. Adria Aero Lloyd reduced running expenses to a minimum by employing only a manager, a secretary, two pilots, two mechanics and two aeroplanes. By operating the passenger service exclusively between the hours of 7 and 9.30 a.m., when the air currents over the mountains are at their stillest, they succeeded in completely avoiding accidents. In 1927 the German company was bought out by the Italians, who obtained from the Albanian Government a monopoly of air-transport. Ala Littoria then proceeded to work excellent and frequent services between Brindisi and Tirana, Tirana and Salonika, and between Tirana and the various towns in the North and South, such as Scutari, Kukus, Korea and Valona. The saving of time entailed may be realised from the fact that the journey from Korea to Tirana was a five day business by mountain tracks only a score of years ago; the Italians built a road, and reduced it to one day; by air it takes a single hour.

In connection with the Scutari rebellion of 1926, we have already noticed that the telephone had been introduced. It did not, however, communicate with the international exchanges, and it was lamentably inefficient. The ordinary public service used zinc instead of copper for its wires; this was cheaper, but less reliable. The Gendarmerie had a system of its own, with copper wires, and in case of difficulty the Post Office and the Gendarmerie used each other's lines. Telegrams were sent by the telephone wires.

The list of exports, given above, indicates clearly the nature of Albanian economy; the products referred to are all things which are grown—or caught. The great question for the people, therefore, is the adequacy of their land. The Government unhappily found that there was not nearly enough land to give everybody a proper

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livelihood; nor was the land that there is properly distributed. People did not, in practice, starve to death, because in hard times a large family, living together, could grow enough to keep themselves alive; but the peasants lived at a very low standard of comfort. Plans were constantly afoot for increasing the land available to small holders, either by carrying out an "Agrarian Reform"—i.e. cutting up the larger estates and giving holdings to the peasants—or by actually getting more land into cultivation by drainage of marshes and lakes.

The most obvious piece of large-scale reclamation which cried out to be done was the draining of the Lake of Scutari. This lake consists of 39,000 hectares normally under water, and a further 41,500 hectares submerged in the annual floods. (A hectare is 2.471 acres, or to all intents and purposes 2½ acres.) But the question of draining the Lake, or preventing the flooding of the surrounding land, was complicated by the fact that the Albano-Yugoslav frontier runs down the centre of the Lake, and there are therefore two countries interested in the project. Moreover, the River Drin, which feeds the Lake, has suffered a change of course, and has raised the level of the water. However, it has been estimated that an expenditure of one million pounds would suffice to lower the water to such a level that arable land would be drained, capable of repaying in five years the expenditure of capital. In 1936 the Albanian and Yugoslav Governments were discussing the project, with a view to financing it on a fifty-fifty basis.

An obvious need was for an Agrarian Reform. This, however, was a tricky business, for political reasons. In the South of Albania, which was more thoroughly conquered by the Turks than was the North, there were considerable estates held by Moslem Beys, for whom (under the Turkish regime) the Christian peasants worked as "rayahs". These were the landowners who would be dispossessed by the reform, and who accordingly regarded the project with the gravest misgiving. Compensation for dispossessed owners is at the best of times a complicated problem; in backward Albania it was possible—indeed, in view of the state of the revenues, only too

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probable—that *the* owners would get nothing at all. Bishop Fan NoU, the Harvard-trained reformer, set about the preparation of such a reform in 1924, and it was largely for this reason that he had to go. Even King Zog himself, for all his moral and material ascendancy, did not venture to broach Agrarian Reform until 1930, after he had already broken with his prospective father-in-law, Shefket Bey Vrlaci, who had formerly exercised a restraining influence upon him in regard to this particular measure. Shef ket was, of course, a big landowner. Eventually, when Agrarian Reform was discussed in Parliament, Shefket had the temerity to vote against it.

As finally decided upon, the Agrarian Reform was upon the following lines: every owner was to retain 40 hectares (nearly 100 acres) for each male member of his family. Of the remainder, one-third would be taken away, against compensation at the rate of 20 gold francs per hectare; the other two-thirds remained in the possession of the owner, but if he leased it, he must share with the tenant the cost of irrigation and other development. King Zog remarked in 1935: "I intend that within two years, every Albanian shall have a plot of land."

A necessary adjunct to any such scheme is, of course, an Agricultural Bank. This was duly founded, with a capital of five million gold francs, secured on new taxes on alcohol, rents and patents. The King and all public servants took up shares, to the extent of one month's salary, thus acquiring a "stake in the country". By 1935 the scheme was well under way, but the then Government was too much preoccupied by international affairs—relations with Italy required adjusting just then—to put much energy into pushing ahead with the reform, which was by no means complete. The actual carrying out of the reform provoked a rising in the South; but this was fairly easily suppressed. Shefket Vrlaci was, as might be expected, implicated in it, and had to go abroad. Meanwhile, the progress of the reform was further delayed by the fact that the Commission charged with it had also on its hands another job, namely, the settlement of Albanian immigrants; and this took up much of their time.

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It should be realised that, in writing of any measure of reform or project for development in Albania, it is not sufficient to say that on so-and-such a date a bill was passed, or a decree issued. There was always an immense time-lag between the conception of a project and its adoption, and a still greater delay before it was actually put into execution. Moreover, insufficiency of funds often held up projects when they were actually being carried out; and the administrative machinery at all times worked with exceeding slowness. A reform, therefore, must not be regarded as an action or an event, taking place in a certain limited period of time, but rather as a continuous process, so that, ten years after its beginning, one does not ask "Was it carried out?", but "How far has it got?" Even to this question the answer was often somewhat vague.

The Government realised the necessity of greatly improving technical standards in all the forms of Albanian agriculture. For example, on the Lake of Ohnda there is a fishing industry, and Danish help was secured with a view to an improvement of its methods and output. (Incidentally, it is greatly to be hoped that this improvement will not necessitate the supersession of the extremely picturesque rough-hewn log boats, which have been used on the Lake from time immemorial, and are still used to-day.)

It was further proposed to begin the cultivation of cotton, and to improve and modernise the practice of dairying and agriculture. An ingenious scheme was put on foot for missionising the olive-growers; one half of every year's contingent of conscripts called up for the army was to be employed not on soldiering but on receiving from competent instructors education in the proper methods of cultivating and picking olives. The King would thereby save on his military budget, and the conscripts would return home as missionaries of the new methods. If the standard of production could in fact be improved by this method, it would be extremely valuable, because the olive-growers had long practised a lazy habit of bashing the olives down from the trees with sticks, instead of picking them properly. This laziness caused the olives to be bruised, and spoilt their value for export.



Weavers resting by the roadside: Slikodcr (Scutari).



Tobacco drying near Elbasan.

Cutting the Coat

In order to improve the native strains of wheat and maize, seed was brought from Yugoslavia, with excellent results. In 1932, during the economic crisis, seed and agricultural machinery, goats, rams, bulls, stallions, were distributed to the peasantry. In 1936 a scheme was launched to raise the school-leaving age from 13 to 15, in order that each boy and girl might receive two years' training in agriculture. This plan, besides suffering from the delays inherent in all the Albanian Government's projects, was only devised in the first place to come into force gradually over a period of ten years. One still wondered whether the school-leaving age would in practice be raised to 15 in Albania earlier than in Great Britain! However, the Italian invasion put an end to such speculations.

The economic crisis hit the olive industry severely, for Italy imposed an import duty, and the market for Albanian olives was greatly contracted. The wheat and maize harvest was poor in 1931, and in 1932 it was attacked by locusts. For the relief of the consequent distress, the Government decreed a moratorium for farmers' debts, but this palliative measure produced the usual result of moratoria: it dried up the springs of credit, and the peasants could not obtain fresh loans. The depression extended to the sheep-grazing industry. Owners of pasturage raised their grazing charges, thus throwing the sheep-owners into debt, and in many cases ruining them; they were then obliged to sell both their lambs and their cheeses at ruinously low rates. Furthermore, in 1931 the United States imported 400,000 dollars' worth of Albanian cheeses; but in 1932 she imposed a tariff which practically excluded them from the American market.

Of industries in the ordinary sense, there are practically none in Albania. A former British Minister to Albania was induced to lend his name to the prospectus of a new brewery company; but his signature was procured by misrepresentation, and the company turned out to be a swindle. In 1933 a British company obtained a concession to mine copper; and in 1936 an Albanian company was given a concession to manufacture textiles at Tirana, assisted by a ten years' monopoly. Every now and then there were rumours of

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the discovery of gold; it would have been poetic justice had such a gift of fortune accrued to a nation which was, not long ago, the only one in Europe to have its currency firmly anchored to the gold standard!

One of the most important possibilities for the future wealth of Albania is its resources of oil. Prospecting licences were granted first to the Anglo-Persian Oil Company, later to French interests, and finally to Italy. Oil was struck near Valona in 1926. The French claim was not developed, and Anglo-Persian found that the quantities of oil discovered, and the difficulty of mining it, rendered the business insufficiently profitable; they therefore gave up their concession. The Albanian Government much regretted this decision, since it was always desirable whenever possible to have a counterweight to any Italian hold upon the country. From the Italian point of view, the oil was not so much a commercial as a political asset, and was exploited strictly from the political and strategic point of view. In 1936 the Italians obtained 10,000 metric tons, and at that time they were hoping to increase the output within three years to 80,000 tons.

The great problem facing all Albanian Governments is that of money. Neither economic development, nor advancement of civilised amenities, education, administration, proper payment of officials, abolition of corruption, or even the maintenance of internal law and order can be undertaken without the backing of a reasonably well-furnished exchequer. The first task of King Zog, when he attained power as President Ahmed Zogu at the beginning of 1925, was to obtain financial backing—to "raise the wind/

The new ruler's first hope was Yugoslavia. The Yugoslavs had helped him back to power, and might reasonably be expected to spend some money to enable him to remain there. However, they had no money available, at any rate upon the scale required. That being so, the next hope was the League of Nations, which would have been by far the best lender, since if it demanded some control of Albanian finances, it would at least have no particular axe to grind. Unfortunately, during his earlier Premiership, Zog had blotted his copybook in regard to the League's financial depart-

Cutting the Coat

ment. There had been a League Financial Adviser, and Zog had returned him to store, on the ground that Albania could not afford his salary. Whether for this reason or through Italian contriving, no loan was forthcoming from Geneva. There was nothing for it but to apply to Italy, and, as Mussolini afterwards said: "Zog knew he would have to be a puppet"; Italian loans would not be granted from pure disinterested friendship. At least, however, the money was to be had. Shefqet Vrlaci, Zog's then ally, had been in Rome while Zog was in Belgrade, keeping the door open, in case Italian assistance (or at any rate, non-opposition to Zog's return) should be required.

The first step was to establish a proper currency. Until 1925 all manner of foreign currencies had circulated in Albania, including gold Napoleons, British pre-war sovereigns, and the silver coins of the Latin Monetary Union. They were all related to the nominal currency, the gold franc, which remained approximately equal in value to the Swiss franc. Zog felt it necessary to establish an Albanian National Bank, and by its means to float an Albanian currency. With Italian help he formed in 1925 the Banka Kombetare e Shqipnis. (Shqipnis is the Albanian word for Albania.)

When the corporation for the bank was being formed, it was announced that 51 per cent, of the shares would be in Albanian hands. However, some of the concerns, supposedly Albanian, which owned the shares were themselves owned by Italian banks, and in the end it was Italy which had a controlling interest in the Albanian Bank. Other countries were invited to participate, and Switzerland and Belgium took up small blocks of shares. Yugoslav banks came in later. The ownership of the shares was eventually distributed, **according to nationality, as follows:—**

Italy		320,000
Yugoslavia		50,000
Switzerland		50,000
Belgium		25,000
Albania		150,000

Total	595,000
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Italy's share, 53 per cent.

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Italy procured her controlling interest cheaply, for of her 320,000 shares, mostly owned by Credito Italiano, 100,000 were "Founders' Shares", worth 1¼ francs each, while all the rest of the shares were issued at 25 francs each. The head office of the Bank, and its gold reserve, were at first in Albania, but were soon transferred to Rome. In view of the predatory tendencies of some Albanian politicians, this was no doubt a wise precaution on the part of the shareholders; but it did not tend to enhance Albania's independence.

Other countries, notably Britain and France, had lost an opportunity in letting Italy dig herself in at the root of Albanian finances. This became clear in the following year, when (attempts to secure a Yugoslav or a League loan having failed) a loan of 50 million gold francs, bearing interest at 13 per cent., was floated by a company known as S.V.E.A.—*Società per lo Sviluppo Economico dell' Albania*. This company was formed and owned by the Albanian National Bank; and the Bank in its turn was controlled by Credito Italiano. S.V.E.A. obtained concessions for the State Monopolies, and for a great part of the forests and minerals. Owing to the depreciation of the lira at this juncture in terms of gold, Albania made a profit on the exchange. Before the conclusion of the loan, Albania promised Italy not to take any action, for the next forty years, that might prejudice her revenues, without first obtaining the agreement of Italian interests. This clause was systematically used to impede the development of Albania's resources.

The remainder of Albania's financial transactions are wrapped up with the semi-political, semi-financial relations between herself and Italy. In July 1931 Italy promised Albania a loan of 100 million gold francs, to be paid in annual instalments of 10 millions, and not to be repaid until the Albanian budget reached 50,000,000 gold francs annually—of which there was no immediate prospect. The first instalment of this loan was paid; but when King Zog refused to renew the Pact of Tirana (for which see next chapter) upon its expiry in November 1931, Italy ceased payment. King Zog was standing upon his independence. Unfortunately, early in 1932 there fell due a payment of service of the old S.V.E.A. loan, and this

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could not be met. Italy granted a moratorium for one year, but in January 1933 the situation was no better, and now there were two instalments of S.V.E.A. loan service to be met, amounting to eight million gold francs. Italy offered to renew the moratorium of the previous year, and continue her payments under the 1931 agreement; but the political and economic terms attached to this offer were so onerous that King Zog turned them down flat. Not until 1936 did the Frasheri Ministry come to a general settlement with Italy, regulating their mutual financial and political arrangements. In October 1936 another loan was granted by the Bank of Naples, of 3,735,000 gold francs, for further harbour works at Durazzo—a highly strategic loan!

The hold which Italy thus obtained upon Albanian economy was ruthlessly employed to prevent the Albanians from developing their resources with the aid of other foreign capital. The King of Albania is of the opinion that, given a fresh start after the war, Albania is capable of considerable economic development as an independent State. "I knew all along what the Italians were after", he told me, "and I prevented them from getting control of the country by peaceful means. In the end, they could only get hold of Albania by conquest."

CHAPTER SEVEN

Two Cats—One Mouse

WE have already seen the greedy eyes of Italy cast longingly upon Albania during the days when the House of Zog had not come to power, when the future of the little country was a matter for speculation among the Great Powers. Signor Nitti pursued a policy of renunciation; but he was not followed in this respect by Signor Mussolini, who came to power in Italy in 1922. The Fascist Government was not in time to secure the hoped-for Mandate from the League of Nations, and had to content itself with awaiting internal trouble in Albania (or promoting it), in order to avail itself of the promise of the other Great Powers to allow Italy, as mandatory of the League, to "restore order". Meanwhile, however, the policy was adopted of trying to *buy* Albania, by pouring money into the Albanian Exchequer, as well as into the private purses of the King and of his Ministers. Eventually, the power of the League of Nations declined, and it was possible to revert to more direct and old-fashioned methods; but for a number of years (from 1925 till 1939) Italy played with Albania a sort of game of Cat and Mouse.

In the earlier stages of the game Italy was only one of two or three cats, all interested in the same mouse. The cat to the southward, Greece, was dealt with in spectacular fashion by the bombardment of Corfu. An Italian General, a member of the Inter-Allied Commission engaged in drawing on the ground Albania's Southern frontier, was murdered—allegedly by Greeks, and on Greek soil. The Italians seized the excuse to bombard Corfu, murdering a number of civilians, and to occupy it, until the League of Nations and the Conference of Ambassadors made them withdraw their troops. Greece was obliged to pay compensation for the slaying of General Tellini. Thereafter, Greek interest in Albania (until 1939) was mainly confined to disputes about minorities, and tendentious



Buffalo wagon: Durcs (Durazzo).

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messages in the Greek press, reporting every shooting affray in Albania as a violent revolution.

Yugoslavia could not be so easily disposed of, and for a few years the two Powers confronted one another across Albania, each in turn starting some diplomatic incident, and trying to steal a march upon the other. When at last Yugoslavia found that the game was hopeless, because Italy had by far the longer purse, she dropped out. From that time until 1939 Italy was the only cat, and Albania played quite realistically the part of the mouse, making repeated attempts to avoid being eaten, but after every apparent escape being drawn back into the corner, where, without any outside help, she was left to face the formidable mouser who played and played until the time came for a final swallow.

It was the misfortune of King Zog that it was frankly impossible for his country to be run, either politically or economically, without money being advanced by somebody. If no money could be got, then Albania would have either to be ruled by foreigners or not ruled at all. The departure of the Turks had left anarchy, and even *with* money it was as much as a central Government could do to hold the tribes together, organise their trade and their welfare, keep their rebellious spirits in awe, and maintain armies, a bureaucracy, a Gendarmerie, communications, and some attempt at economic development.

The first step was to float the Albanian National Bank and the S.V.E.A. loan; it was the first step, that is to say, both for King Zog in trying to build up his kingdom, and for the Italians in trying to get a hold upon Albania. The next move was with the Italians, and was carried out by their then Minister to Albania, Baron Aloisi, in July of 1926.

Aloisi became a specialist in Italy's diplomatic dirty work. At this particular time, he was trying to bluff a small, poor country out of its independence. Some years later, when his country was engaged upon the rape of another backward independent State, Ethiopia, it was Aloisi's task to defend his Government's case at Geneva. This he did with considerable ability, in view of the

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weakness of Italy's moral position; he put great energy into the job of delaying and obstructing the League's procedure.

In July 1926 Baron Aloisi presented to the President of the Albanian Republic (as Zog then was) a set of demands, to which Zog was asked to accede. In the first place, Albania was asked to recognise Italy's right to "protect" Albania, arising out of the 1921 agreement between the four Great Powers. Since Albania was not a party to this agreement, it had no force to bind her; but Italy hoped to induce the Albanian Government voluntarily to accept the scheme. Secondly, Italy sought to remove a source of some annoyance to her, the force of Gendarmerie founded in the previous year under British Inspectors. Albania was asked to dismiss the British Inspectors, and to replace them by Italians. Thirdly, Italy was to be put in a controlling position in regard to Albania's financial administration. Such control might well have led to better financial administration, but it, like all the other demands, were totally impossible for any country to accept if it proposed to retain its independence. The Italians tried to make the path of acceptance sweeter by offering the President a very adequate personal *douceur*; "Le Matin" placed the figure at fifteen million lire.

The President, upon receiving Aloisi's demands, immediately asked the advice of the British Minister, Mr. Reilly. The only honest advice which could be given was that the President should refuse; Reilly advised accordingly, and the President turned down the demands. The British Foreign Office supported its Minister by making enquiries in Rome as to the object and meaning of the *d-marche*. Mussolini put off the enquiry with the lamest explanations, which were presumably never intended to be believed. He said that Baron Aloisi had grossly exceeded his instructions, and that he, Mussolini, had never heard about the demands until after they had been presented. The Italian leader did not even lend colour to this unlikely story by recalling Aloisi in disgrace; on the contrary, the Minister remained at Tirana, openly boasting that he would be revenged upon Mr. Reilly by procuring his recall. Sure enough, Sir Austen Chamberlain, then Foreign Secretary of

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Great Britain, went for a yachting cruise in the Mediterranean, met Mussolini for a long conversation off Leghorn, and not long afterwards recalled Mr. Reilly. The chain of cause and effect may be denied; but the *post hoc propter hoc* imputation is so strong that the Albanians very naturally considered that Great Britain had sold them out to Italy. In terms of pre-1914 Power Politics, of course, there was no reason why Britain should not give Italy a free hand in a region in which Britain had little direct interest; but the leading upholders of the Covenant of the League of Nations, the rights of small nations, and decent standards of international behaviour, should not have exposed themselves to the charge of betraying their principles. As King Zog said to me: "It is a pity that Great Britain was disinterested in us, leaving us to Rome, Belgrade and Athens."

Aloisi's demarche took place in July; in November there broke out the great rebellion in the North (promoted by the Italians) which has already been described in an earlier chapter. While this rebellion was at its height, Mr. Reilly had to leave Albania, notwithstanding a protest from the President, who felt an urgent need for the moral support of an experienced British Minister, who knew Albania and its difficulties. At this juncture, Aloisi presented a fresh set of demands, which the incoming British Minister, Mr. Seeds, advised the President to accept. Thus there came about the signing, on November 27th (the day before Independence Day) of the Pact of Tirana (not to be confused with the *Treaty* of Tirana, signed a year later).

On this occasion, Baron Aloisi did not (as previously) overplay his hand. The terms of the Pact contained in a much more veiled form the threat to Albanian Independence, and did not give any immediate pledges or control to the Italians, such as might have turned Albania *de facto* into an Italian-run country.

The terms of the Pact were as follows:—

1. Albania and Italy recognise that any disturbance, of whatsoever kind, directed against the *status quo*, political, juridical or territorial, of Albania, is contrary to their reciprocal interests.

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2. For the protection of the above-mentioned interests, the High Contracting Parties pledge themselves to lend their mutual support and their co-operation; they pledge themselves equally not to conclude with other Powers political and military agreements to the prejudice of the interests of the other Party, as defined in the present Pact.
3. The High Contracting Parties pledge themselves to submit to special procedure of conciliation or arbitration matters of difference that may arise, which it shall not have been possible to adjust by ordinary diplomatic procedure. The form of this procedure of peaceful regulation shall be the subject of a special Convention, which shall be concluded within a short time.
4. The present Pact is for a period of five years, and can be denounced or renewed one year before its expiry.
5. The present Pact will be ratified and subsequently registered with the League of Nations. Ratifications will be exchanged in Rome.

Done at Tirana, November 27th, 1926.

The Pact was duly ratified on December 9th, not without criticism from the Albanian Deputies, who complained that it gave Italy the right to intervene whenever she chose—for example, to uphold the political *status quo*, which presumably meant Zogu's Government. To allay this anxiety, the Albanian Foreign Minister, Elias Vrioni, asked Baron Aloisi for assurances. In a somewhat sarcastic letter, Aloisi replied:—

"The mutual support and collaboration cannot be interpreted otherwise than as a collaboration resulting from propositions made by one Party, and freely accepted by the other. Moreover, it is obvious that collaboration can thus be manifested only if one of the Parties asks for it."

Vrioni wanted this explanation to be attached to the Pact itself, and registered at Geneva as an addendum or protocol to the Pact, but the Italians would not agree to this, and Vrioni was able to get the Albanian Deputies to accept the explanation as it was, and to

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ratify the Pact. The point was, that Albania need not be "supported" by the Italians unless she asked for it.

The Yugoslavs were enraged at the Pact. Article Two was so drawn as to prevent Albania from concluding another Pact, of a similar nature, with another State—that is to say, with Yugoslavia. It was a long time before the Yugoslavs got over their indignation; on several occasions they prepared to raise in the League of Nations the awkward question of the compatibility of the Pact of Tirana with the League Covenant. In this matter, Mussolini new-found friendship with Sir Austen Chamberlain stood him in good stead. Sir Austen, in Mussolini's interests, worked upon Aristide Briand to use his influence with the Yugoslavs to get them to refrain from raising so delicate a matter at Geneva. But in the series of incidents which now followed, there was always anxiety on the part of Italy and her big friends lest the Pact of Tirana be raised at Geneva by the Yugoslavs.

The next battle in the war of incidents was the launching of a scare by "*Giornale d'Italia*", in March 1927, to the effect that Yugoslavia was concentrating troops on the Albanian border, and was enrolling komitadjis for an unofficial invasion, which the regular troops would later on support. When this matter was discussed at Geneva, somebody brightly suggested the sending of an international commission of investigation, to discover whether there were komitas upon the frontier or not. Many useful things might have been accomplished by such a commission; but among them was not that of ascertaining the existence of komitas, if these wished to remain hidden. It would pass the wit of the most experienced investigator to tell a Serbian peasant who was enrolled a member of a komita from a precisely similar Serbian peasant who was not.

The "*Giornale d'Italia*" scare was eventually disposed of, only to be succeeded by a fresh incident, this time engineered by Yugoslavia, and concerned with the arrest of a man named Juraskovic. This individual was a Serbian, resident for many years in Durazzo, who was arrested by the Albanian authorities on a charge of espionage.

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The Yugoslav Legation had from time to time employed him on a casual basis for interpreting or translating; but he was in no sense one of the Legation staff. This did not deter the Yugoslavs from claiming him as one of their diplomats, and demanding his release on the ground of his alleged diplomatic immunity. They sent a rude note to the Albanian Government, and withdrew their Legation from Tirana. King Zog dealt with the matter energetically, getting on the 'phone to Dr. Marinković, then Yugoslav Foreign Minister, and an old acquaintance from the days when the King was an exile in Belgrade. Eventually this flutter blew over, like its predecessor.

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THE Yugoslavs had now shot their bolt in Albanian affairs; henceforward they fade out of the picture, and Italy is left alone to deal with the Albanians. On November 22nd 1927—a year, all but a few days, after the Pact of Tirana—King Zog concluded a new agreement with Italy; this was known as the Treaty of Tirana, and took the form of a bilateral defensive alliance, binding each country to come to the assistance of the other, if that other were attacked. In the event of a war, and the coming into operation of the help foreseen in the Treaty, the joint forces of the two countries were to be commanded by a General belonging to the country which had been attacked; this was generally imagined to envisage an Italian Commander-in-Chief wearing an Albanian uniform!

Yugoslavia was not so defeatist about Albania as to refrain from the appropriate howl of protest; but a most ingenious explanation was advanced by Signor Ugo Sola, the new Italian Minister in Tirana. Whereas, he said, the former Pact had been drawn up in Italian and Albanian, the new Treaty was written in English. The reason was that it was modelled upon the ancient treaty of alliance still subsisting between Great Britain and Portugal. So far from the Anglo-Portuguese Treaty giving Britain a chance to dominate Portugal, it had recently happened that the *smaller* partner entered the Great War *to assist her great ally*, under the terms of the alliance.

In the years 1928, '29 and '30 Italian policy was directed to obtaining control of Albania's armed forces. Italy endeavoured to use her economic power over Albania to influence the military policy of King Zog; could she but control the forces upon which Zog relied for the maintenance of order and of his authority, she

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would have Albania in the hollow of her hand. She therefore urged a big, expensive army, and supplied "instructors" to train it and to spread Italian sentiment.

The Royal Albanian Army at this time consisted of three so-called "army groups"—they were really brigades—each composed of three battalions of 500 men, and two mountain guns. There were, in addition, four frontier battalions of 350 men each, and a similar battalion of guards at Tirana. For this army Italy supplied a number of officers, variously reported as 42 or 62 in number. Technically, they were attached to the army groups as advisers or "organisers"; but in fact they were in control. Other technical advisers (engineers, doctors, etc.) brought the number of *service* Italians (excluding commercials) up to 101. Italians ran the Bombing School and the Cadet School, and taught physical jerks to the End Kombtar, or militia for lads between 15 and 19 years old. The Royal Albanian Navy, consisting of two launches, had six Italian officers.

The Albanian army, thus run by Italians, was supposed to be recruited by conscription, but it was difficult to induce the freedom-loving mountaineers to serve; they hated drill and dragooning, and it was too expensive to send and fetch them. Recruits, upon joining their regiments, had to wear boots for the first time in their lives, and developed ailments of the feet which incapacitated them for several days.

The greatest difficulty was to provide the army with officers. The earliest Albanian officers tended to regard their jobs as an excuse for dignified lounging, and to model themselves upon the Ruritanian-cum-Merry Widow tradition. The natural officer class was the tribal chiefs; but there was no inducement to these to resign their independence, and the best the King could do was to give them militia commissions on half pay, thus acquiring a lien on their services in case of emergency.

Albania was not particularly keen about its army, which in any case would not be big enough to withstand attack by a foreign force with modern equipment. But the Italians insisted that the army



What the well-dressed woman wears.

be kept at a size which imposed a serious strain upon the Albanian exchequer, because they calculated that it could resist a Yugoslav invasion along prepared lines, according to the Pariani defensive plan (General Pariani, subsequently War Minister in Rome, was for some years Inspector-General of the Albanian Army), while Italy hurried troops across the Adriatic.

The Albanian army was supported and yet counter-balanced by two further sources of power. While disarming the people generally (the Government collected 180,000 rifles in 14 years) the King for some years left arms in the hands of his own tribesmen, the Mati, and of one other friendly tribe. Further, he had an excellent Gendarmerie, run by ten British Colonels as Inspectors, and Major-General Sir Jocelyn Percy (a British officer of the very best type) as Inspector-General. This force provided an admirable training-ground in police work in difficult country, and in local administration; law and order were pretty well maintained, and brigandage" kept in check, so far as the highest authorities did not intervene over the heads of the Gendarmerie to protect malefactors. General Percy was able to give the King much disinterested advice; some of it was adopted, some not; but always the King respected his British adviser. The General's difficulties, through the traditions of nepotism and lawlessness, were formidable; moreover, in the early days the pay for the Gendarmerie units was received in bulk by their Albanian officers, and lucky were the men who received what was their due. (One is reminded of Sergeant Lamb, and the British army of the eighteenth century.) Very soon after the British Inspectors got into the saddle, this fundamental defect was rectified. All this time the Italians were perpetually asking or demanding that the King should get rid of the British Inspectors, and replace them with Italians. With equal stubbornness the King refused. At last, in 1938, the contracts of General Percy and his Colonels expired, and were not renewed. In the middle of the collapse of British prestige at Munich, the British officers came home from Albania; but Zog did not replace them with Italians. Thirteen years of **British guidance had built up a fine force**, and the Gendarmerie

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continued its tasks under the exclusive direction of its own Albanian officers.

Meanwhile, Italian pressure was causing discontent among the Albanian people. The Albanians always disliked the Italians, and were suspicious that their country was being "sold" to their Western neighbours. They observed the gradual sacrifice of their national independence, as the price for receiving Italian loans; and they attached little value to the purposes upon which the loans were spent—harbour works at the perfectly adequate port at Durazzo; the maintenance of a swollen, Italian-run, revolt-suppressing army; and the personal enrichment of Ministers. As opinion rose against the Italians, the King's position became increasingly difficult; if he pursued an anti-Italian or non-compliant policy, Rome would destroy him; if he appeared to be serving Italian ends, his own people might overthrow him. It was a vicious circle: Albania could not pay her way, so Italian loans were needed; the price of loans (or part of the price) was an over-large, over-expensive, Italian-run army; but this army consumed half of the tiny budget, and prevented Albania from reaching real solvency. Meanwhile, the service of the old loan of 1926—the S.V.E.A. loan, mentioned towards the end of the previous chapter—could not be met.

Between 1931 and 1933, the years of the economic crisis, the question of Albanian finances and Albanian independence came to a head. In July 1931, while Pandeli Evangheli was Premier and Elias Vrioni was Foreign Minister, Italy promised to Albania a loan of one hundred million gold francs, free of interest, to be repaid only when the budget reached a certain figure, not yet anywhere near in sight. The loan was to be paid over to Albania in ten annual instalments of ten million gold francs each. The first payment was actually made, and was duly spent by the Albanians.

Four months later, in November 1931, the Pact of Tirana (1926) ran out its five years' course, and fell due to be renewed or denounced. King Zog had no love for an agreement which practically gave Italy a contingent protectorate over his kingdom; when the time came, he simply refused entirely to renew the Pact. He

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contended, very reasonably, that the more recent Treaty of Tirana made him an ally of Italy upon (nominally) equal terms; why, therefore, should he continue an arrangement in which he was very plainly made subordinate to his neighbour?

In the next January (1932) there fell due a payment of interest and amortisement of the S.V.E.A. loan. In the existing economic situation Albania was quite unable to meet her obligation. She asked for a year's moratorium, and was granted it. But the ill-effect of a year's moratorium is that in a year's time the unhappy debtor has to find two instalments. In January 1933 Albania was again unable to pay, and Italy had held up the payment in the other direction of the instalment due under the promise made in July 1931. Italy was at her game of blackmail again: bribes for compliance, but a cutting off of supplies if Albania were obdurate. Among the demands with which Zog was asked to comply were the replacement of the British Gendarmerie Inspectors by Italians, Albania's entry into the Italian Customs Union, further Italian control of the finances, and of the sugar, telegraph and electricity monopolies; Italian was to be taught in the schools; Italian settlers were to colonise parts of Albania's territory. Thus, Italy tried to obtain full control of everything that mattered in Albania—armed forces, economics, communications, administration, education and land. In return for these far-reaching concessions, she offered an extension of the moratorium for the S.V.E.A. loan service, and the resumption of payments of the one hundred million franc loan of July 1931. King Zog firmly said "NO!"

This was one of those cases where King Zog was driven too far; he could not say "yes" without abandoning the independence of his country, and no doubt also the allegiance of his subjects. Nevertheless, it was a courageous "No". The Cabinet was frightened, and resigned, and it took several weeks to get a fresh Ministry formed, under Pandeli EvangheU. Vnoni, the Foreign Minister, was dropped, his place being taken by a competent official named Jafer Vila. The King could not now afford to go back; he had to tighten the national belt and hope for the best.

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At least the King could depend upon the support of his subjects in the sacrifices that had to be made to ensure Albanian independence of Italy. In the previous September a plot against him had been discovered, its object being to put a stop to his alleged betrayal of the country to the Italians. A policy of resistance to Italy was therefore sure to be popular.

The economies undertaken were sufficiently drastic. The total budget was forthwith cut by no less than 28 per cent.; Civil Service salaries by 30 per cent. The King gave up entirely his personal income for the year 1933-4. Nearly all the Italian advisers in the Ministries, experts at this and that, officers attached to the Albanian army, were packed off, and their salaries saved. Furthermore, all the schools in the country were taken over by the State, so that the Catholic denominational schools in Northern Albania, founded and run by Italians, were nationalised. Finally, negotiations were opened with Yugoslavia for a commercial treaty.

The gloves were now (for the moment) off. Mussolini cancelled altogether the agreement of July 1931, and the promised loan of one hundred million gold francs. King Zog replied by stopping the teaching of Italian at the High School at Korça, and substituting French; in June 1934 Albania and Yugoslavia actually signed a trade agreement. Mussolini now realised that he had lost his grip upon Albania, and felt that drastic measures must be taken to restore it; he therefore staged a naval demonstration off the Albanian coast.

It is an unheard-of breach of international courtesy for the warships of one country to appear at the ports of another without any previous announcement, except where some hostile demonstration is intended. Italy was supposed to be the ally of Albania; yet on June 23rd 1934 a naval squadron of 19 Italian vessels appeared unannounced off Durazzo, and the Italian Admiral informed the local authorities that he was going to send his men ashore. Subsequent enquiry at Rome produced a shady story to the effect that the Ministry of Marine's request to the Foreign Ministry to notify the Albanian authorities of ~~the~~ contemplated visit had gone astray;



Hoisting a water buffalo on board : Durres (Durazzo).

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but that kind of inefficiency does not happen in an efficiently run Fascist administration—or does it? The story was too thin to be believed; evidently, the Italians purposely sent their squadron unannounced, in order to over-awe the Albanians and put pressure on them to return to the Italian orbit.

The Italian demonstration was a failure. The Prefect and the Commandant at Durazzo were perplexed at the Admiral's proposal to land his men; they therefore asked him whether he had come upon a friendly visit, or was making a demonstration. His bluff called, the Admiral assured the Albanians that he had come as a friend and ally. The Prefect thereupon invited him to land his men—but, being friends and allies, they would not, of course, require to bring their arms ashore with them.

It has been suggested that" the Italians intended to come ashore armed, and provoke trouble; and that they hoped their arrival would be the signal for another Northern Rebellion, like that of 1927. They are supposed to have reasoned that the Catholics would be smarting under the closing of the Catholic denominational schools. If that was their idea, they little knew the nature of Albanian Catholicism. The Catholics well understood that the closing of their schools was a move against the Italians, and appreciated it accordingly. Albanian Catholics attach little importance to clericalism.

It was to be presumed that the Italian Minister in Tirana would now avail himself of the opportunity presented by the arrival of his fleet, only twenty miles from the capital, to present to the King a fresh list of demands or proposals. The Prefect of Durazzo had somewhat upset this calculation; it was rather difficult for the Minister to take a strong line, or to pretend to be backed by overwhelming force, when his own Admiral had given to the demonstration the character of a friendly visit. The manoeuvre fizzled out without accomplishing anything, except to deepen the truly fraternal dislike of the Albanians for their "allies". The naval squadron departed whence it came.

The naval demonstration not only failed to shake King Zog;

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it greatly stiffened his resistance. When the fleet had gone away, the Albanian Government asked the Italian Minister what they had wanted. Some requests were put forward, of which the Albanians granted some and refused others, at their discretion. Forty more Italian instructors, whose contracts expired at this moment, were sent back to their own country and not replaced. Anti-Italianism, once practically treasonable, became the fashion, even in official circles. In January 1935 Albania made an attempt to find another financier, and tried to raise a loan in Holland.

Mussolini had the wit to know when he was beaten. He realised that Albania was not yielding to threats; she would have to be bought by golden gifts without too much handle attached. In February 1935 he "placed at the disposal of the Albanian Government" the sum of three million gold francs—a golden olive branch! Preparations were in hand for the invasion of Ethiopia, and Albania's friendship must be assured, even if it were on King Zog's terms.

Two not very important disturbances must be mentioned here, rather for the sake of completeness than for any inherent interest of their own. In December 1934 a certain Captain Barjaktar, who had ruined his career by quarrelling with Musa Yuka (now once more Minister of the Interior), endeavoured unsuccessfully to raise a rebellion. At most this was a minor affray, but the foreign press magnified it into a serious revolt.

The second outbreak occurred in connection with the assassination of General Ghilardi, a close friend of the King. Ghilardi was a pre-war Austro-Hungarian officer, of Croat origin, who became connected with Albania when he was attached to the entourage of William of Wied. Subsequently, he became a friend of the young Mati chieftain, Ahmed Bey Zogu, whose return from exile in 1924 Ghilardi largely stage-managed. Since then, Ghilardi had lived at Court as a friend and adviser of the King. Now, in August 1935, Ghilardi was assassinated at Fieri, and his murder gave the signal for a revolt of the southern landowners; though the assortment of land-reformed Beys, discontented policemen, and other mal-

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contents who joined the rising stood not the slightest chance against the King's forces. They did, however, fight an engagement, in which they killed the Government commander. It was this disturbance, following upon the murder of Ghilardi, which sent ripples across the Lake of Ohrida, causing the suspension of the steamer service, the recall from leave of the Yugoslav garrison commander, and my omission to visit Albania during that particular journey. The King's ex-ally, Shefqet Vrlaci, was suspected of having a hand in this rebellion, and, although nothing was proved against him, he felt it expedient to go abroad; later he was to return as a jackal of the Italians, to be Prime Minister in their regime. Several death sentences were passed on the rebels, and one old fellow, a local notable named Klissura, was apparently sentenced quite unjustifiably. Fortunately, however, his brother went to Tirana and managed to get an interview with the King, who ordered the condemned man's release.

The suppression of these affairs, especially the second, was another sign of Albania's growing strength; it was particularly unwelcome to the Italians, who were appealing to their various "European Askaris" for sympathy in the contemplated attack upon Abyssinia. The danger was that Albania would not merely leave the Italian orbit, but even fall under the influence of some other Power altogether. Lest worse befall, Italy resumed payment of the hundred million loan of July 1931; Albania duly declared, when sanctions were imposed against Italy, that she was not in a position to impose sanctions against her "friend and ally".

The time was coming for a final settlement between Italy and Albania. Knowing, as we now do, what the "final" solution was, from Mussolini's point of view, we shall possibly take less seriously the solemn conversations between the Albanians and the Italians, leading to an agreement negotiated in Rome in 1936. However, in the circumstances of that time, before aggression had definitely become the established practice, as it shortly afterwards did, there seemed a reasonable prospect that a proper *modus vivendi* could be found between the two countries. In October 1935 King Zog

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gave power to an untried batch of men, the "young" men who were coming on in the public service. In Zog's "New Gang" experiment, the Prime Minister was an elderly idealist (since imprisoned by the Italians) named Mehdi Frasheri; the Ministers were young, liberal-minded men. It fell to this Government, and to its young Foreign Minister, Fuad Aslani, to negotiate with the Italians; Aslani and Frasheri went to Rome in March 1936. Fuad Aslani himself described the negotiation to me, some months later, in Tirana.

They started the negotiation from a common-sense point of view. The existing relationship between the two countries was supposed to be one of friendship; yet it had given rise to constant disagreements. The Italians had made themselves extremely unpopular in Albania, and their influence was rejected to the fullest extent that public finance would allow; nevertheless, the two countries could certainly be useful to each other. "What", asked Aslani, "does Italy want? Does she desire Albania to be a weak vassal of Italy, doing her will, but hating her bitterly; seeking any opportunity, especially in the event of war, to throw off the yoke? Or does she desire a free and independent Albania, genuinely grateful for help accorded by her ally?" The Italian Government announced its preference for the latter alternative (the other was postponed for three years). On the basis of Albanian independence and mutual friendship, an agreement was arrived at, to the benefit of both parties.

Both Fuad Aslani and his chief, Mehdi Frasheri, insisted to me that the treaty then concluded was not political but commercial. The principle of genuine friendly collaboration having been agreed upon, it remained merely to discuss business of a financial nature. The Albanian statesmen strenuously denied the report, given currency in the foreign press, that concessions were granted for Italian colonisation.

The first matter to be disposed of was the agreement of 1931, which Italy had not honoured. She had, on that occasion, contractually bound herself to pay annual instalments of ten million gold francs; but she had first suspended payments after the first one,

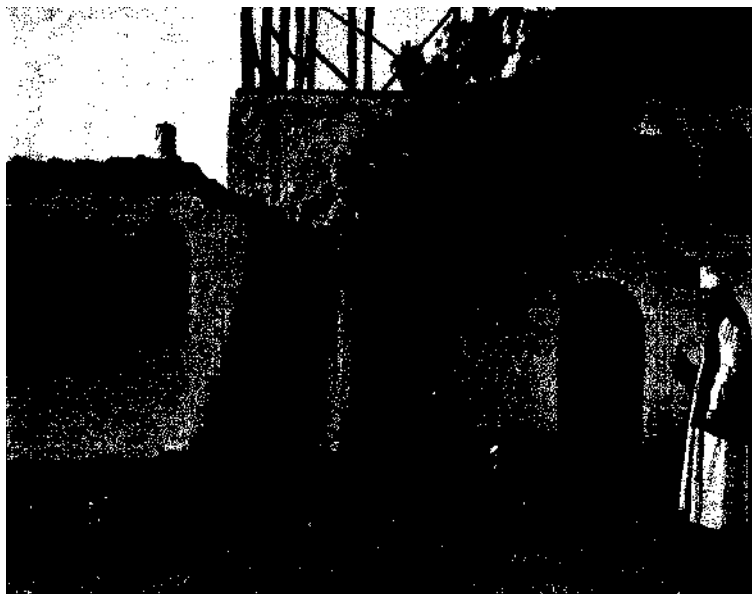
and had then cancelled the agreement altogether. Relying upon Italy's promise, Albania had undertaken certain expenditure, and then had no funds with which to meet it. In order to clear off the indebtedness which the Albanian Government had thus incurred, Italy now undertook to provide some three or four million gold francs. This formed a sort of *amende honorable* for going back on her agreement!

The past having been thus liquidated, Italy undertook to provide fresh loans for the future. To avoid the suggestion of dependence, these loans were to be arranged on a business-like basis, bearing interest, and not in the form of concealed subsidies. The terms, however, were to be easy. The Convention embodying the financial and commercial agreements was signed on March 19th 1936, in Rome. It specified the various objects upon which the loans were to be expended; these included certain agricultural projects, and further harbour works at Durazzo. (One wonders what had happened to all the earlier loans ear-marked for this purpose. Either the Ministers and contractors got a truly colossal rake-off, or the putting into position of miles of concrete blocks is more expensive than the layman would imagine.) It was now said that the port required a proper lighthouse, and considerable dredging, so as, among other objects, to make available deep-water berths alongside the quays for more than one vessel at a time.

The long-drawn-out feud between the Italians and the Albanians now seemed to be settled. Let us examine the situation as it was in the early months of 1937, about a year after Aslani's financial agreement with Italy, and two years before the invasion. The Italian advisers were back again at their posts, though neither in such large numbers as before, nor with the same status; thus, General Pariani used to be an "Excellency**", and the military equivalent of General Percy, with direct access to the King; but his successor in 1937 was a Colonel, attached to the War Ministry, with less than forty Italian officers under him, and no higher title than that of "Senior Military Adviser**". Several of the Ministries had one or two Italian advisers; but the country was not visibly full of Italians,

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in the sense in which, say, Cairo is full of British. One did not see Italian shops or firms in Tirana. Indeed, there was much to justify the opinion, expressed by many observers, that Italy had been wasting her money in Albania. Possibly Mussolini came to the same conclusion, which might account for his drastic action in 1939, when the general international situation was such as to warrant bold measures.



In the Bektashi Monastery: Kruja.



Bektashi monks at Kruja.

CHAPTER NINE

Ecclesiastical Interlude

THE religions of Albania were mentioned in the second chapter. The Moslems have most adherents, with some 700,000 members. The greater part of these belong to the Sunni division of Islam, which is the largest branch of the Moslems, and can perhaps claim to be the parent stock from which other forms are deviations or heresies. There are also some Bektashis, who lead a monastic life, and dilute Islam with mysticism. The Catholics account for about 10 per cent, of the Albanians, or possibly more, and are located in the North, the largest Catholic tribe being the Mirditi. The Orthodox Church is popular in the Centre and the South, and claims about 20 per cent. In addition to all of these, there is a small sect of Uniates.

This chapter will be mostly devoted to the story of the post-war Orthodox Church in Albania, and its long struggle for independence, or, as the Orthodox call it, autocephaly. Before beginning upon the curious story of the Orthodox Bishops, virtuous and vicious, Albanian and Greek, canonical and un-canonical, let us dispose of the Uniates of Elbasan.

The Uniates in general are persons who use the Orthodox Rite, using Greek or Old Slavonic or their own language for their liturgy; their priests are married, and, in fact, they belong to the Orthodox religion in every respect, except one; they admit the supremacy of the Pope. Uniates are to be found all over Eastern Europe. Their *raison d'être* is to make a compromise between religious adherence to the Orthodox or Eastern form of Christianity, and political adherence to peoples and to Powers practising the Latin Rite and admitting the Roman allegiance. When Poles or Austrians or Hungarians acquired or began to take notice of territories with

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an Orthodox population, they would often try to denationalise them, and at the same time change their religion to Catholicism. Frequently, however, religious proselytism provoked a reaction to Orthodoxy, and thus defeated its own ends; the Uniate solution then satisfied both Catholic rulers and Orthodox subjects, for it enabled Jesuit-trained Uniate priests to minister to people who hardly observed that they were not still members of the Orthodox Church. From a political point of view, the Uniates are the Pope's "Fifth Column" in the Orthodox Church, in his perpetual struggle for souls; they are the means by which obstinately Orthodox communities in Catholic countries can be pulled half way over the border. The Vatican sometimes finds it worth while to expend money upon Uniate communities; and the Uniate Church at Elbasan is a case in point.

Religious proselytism was forbidden by law (very sensibly) in the Kingdom of Albania, but the Uniate priest at Elbasan was reputed to maintain and recruit his flock by the distribution of doles, paid out of subsidies from Rome. Fortunately, matters of religion do not seem, in Albania, to go really deeply, as do questions of family honour; Moslem, Catholic, Orthodox, Uniate, tolerate each other sufficiently well. For this reason, the Uniates are not persecuted, but merely laughed at, and that because of the alleged dole. Workmen building a house would banter one of their number who was a Uniate, and ask him when he was next going to the priest to draw his five francs.

Apart from the Uniates, however, the Albanians are by no means a priest-ridden people. Moslems do not, in any case, go in very much for this particular vice; and the Catholics, who do, are in Albania neither sufficiently numerous nor sufficiently devoted. It was possible in 1927 for a Moslem Minister of the Interior to hang a Roman Catholic priest in Scutari, and get away with it; and King Zog was able to secularise the Catholic schools without provoking any disturbance. (The secularisation was recognised as a measure directed against Italian influence, and any Albanian prefers an ounce of anti-Italianism to a ton of piety.)

Ecclesiastical Interlude

More serious than the antics of the Elbasan Uniates were the affairs of the Orthodox Church, which comprises roughly a fifth of the whole population. For twenty years the story of the Albanian Orthodox Church was fairly intricate and most instructive, for it illustrated the political snags of Orthodox Churchmanship. I had much of the story from the present Orthodox Archbishop of Tirana, Kristofor Kissi.

In the normal structure of the Orthodox Church each sovereign State enjoys an independent or "autocephalous" national Church, rather on the lines of the system of independent national Churches in the Anglican Communion. Each national Church is a member of the general Orthodox Church, and is subordinate in matters of doctrine to the general Church Council, and to the Oecumenical Patriarch at Constantinople; but it is independent in its internal organisation. In pre-Turkish times there were autocephalous Serbian and Bulgarian Churches, both using a liturgy in Old Slavonic, and the Greek Church, using Byzantine Greek, which formed, as it were, the Oecumenical Patriarch's own home domain. But in the Turkish period, all the Balkan Churches were at one time or another "gleichgeschaltet" with the Greek Church; the Oecumenical Patriarch, at Constantinople, stood towards the Sultan very much in the position of a High Commissioner for the Sultan's Christian subjects. Thus, to be a Christian in the Balkans was to be labelled "Greek". As the other Balkan peoples achieved their liberation, so did they achieve also their ecclesiastical independence, each National Church receiving in turn a "tomos", or decree of autocephaly, from the Oecumenical Patriarch. At the end of the Great War only Albania still lacked the Patriarch's "tomos", and its own independent or "autocephalous" Church.

The Oecumenical Patriarch not unnaturally felt certain misgivings about granting the Albanian Church its independence. To begin with, it was a minority Church in a mainly Moslem country, and as such might be subjected to pressure from the government. At one time there were rumours that King Zog would turn Catholic, and would put pressure on his Orthodox

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subjects to do the same; actually, he never had the slightest intention of changing either his religion or his habits of toleration. It was further suggested that Greek governmental pressure was brought to bear upon the Patriarch, to induce him to oppose the wishes of the Albanians. However, there was no need for political reasons; it was impossible for the Patriarch to feel confidence in some of the men who then represented his Church in the Albanian hierarchy.

The discussion began in the days when Fan Noh was Bishop of Durazzo. He was an Albanian of Greek and American upbringing, and of respectable character, and was the only Orthodox Bishop actually occupying a see in Albania. His first move was to appoint to the bishopric of Korea a Greek Bishop, Monseigneur Hierotheos; he then opened negotiations with the Oecumenical Patriarchate for a "tomos" of autocephaly. The Patriarch sent Chrysanthos, Bishop of Trebizond, to Albania, and the negotiations proceeded satisfactorily. Fan Noli was able to reach complete agreement with Chrysanthos, who departed to obtain the Patriarch's ratification; this, however, was not forthcoming.

Here was an awkward situation for Bishop Fan Noli. He was now Prime Minister, and somehow or other he had got to float an Albanian national Church. It was impossible (in view of the then relations between Greece and Albania) to maintain a Church in subjection to a Greek Pope; nor would the Patriarch consecrate any Albanian Bishops to fill the three vacant Albanian sees. Fan Noh and Hierotheos might have consecrated Bishops for themselves; but Hierotheos was a Greek, and was not disposed to incur the wrath of the Patriarch. Fan Noli got round the difficulty by inducing the Serbian Metropolitan of Pec, just over the frontier, to consecrate two Albanians as Bishops. Fan Noh intended that he himself, Hierotheos, and the two new Bishops should form the Synod, or governing body of the Albanian Church, replacing the Church Council which was functioning *ad interim* at Korea, under the chairmanship of Father Vassil Marko.

At this juncture Fan Noh fell from power, and had hastily



Orthodox Church at Pojani.

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to leave the country. President Zogu, a Moslem, found an ecclesiastical situation on his hands which was by no means satisfactory. Fan NoH having gone, there remained Hierotheos at Korea (a Greek) and the two Albanian Bishops, recently consecrated in Serbia. Zogu recognised one of the two Albanians, Vissarion (who was Bishop of Tirana) as head of the Albanian Church. Unfortunately, Vissarion had been a scandalously bad choice on the part of Fan Noh.

The appointment of the notorious Vissarion as head of the Church was too much for the Patriarch. He ordered the Bishop of Korea to resign his see and return to Greece, which he did. He then declared the consecration of the two Albanian Bishops to be null and void, since the "tomos" granted to the Serbian Orthodox Church did not entitle a Serbian Archbishop to interfere in the affairs of a territory not within his own jurisdiction. The Albanian Church was thus left with two Bishops, both of them in disobedience to the Patriarch, who challenged the validity of their consecration. Undaunted, they forthwith consecrated a third, to replace the departed Hierotheos at Korea! Meanwhile, Bishop Vissarion cheerfully attended international Church Conferences, and was duly noted by Anglican delegates as suffering from undue pressure in a Catholic direction from the Moslem King.

Vissarion had been a theological student at Athens, and it was impossible to bamboozle the Greeks that he was morally fitted for his office. While he remained at the head of the Albanian Church, no reconciliation with the Patriarchate was possible. At last the scandal of his life became too glaring, and King Zog invited him to resign. Bishop Vissarion left Albania, appealing everywhere for sympathy in his "expulsion due to political reasons".

Zog now very cleverly produced a new and perfectly respectable Bishop out of his hat. One Kristofor Kissi, an Albanian, had been duly consecrated a Bishop in Constantinople before the Great War. He was not in occupation of a see, and was living in Albania after the war, when he got into political trouble and was put in prison.

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King Zog had amnestied him, and he then went to live in a monastery. Upon the departure of Vissarion, Zog hailed Bishop Kissi from his monastic seclusion, and appointed him Bishop of Tirana. Kissi's unimpeachable consecration and blameless life enabled him to open fresh negotiations with the Patriarch with some hope of success. From the Orthodox point of view, the recognition of Kissi as head of the Synod was perfectly in order, because the rules of the Orthodox Church provide that, in case of a vacancy, the senior surviving Bishop, in order of consecration, automatically becomes Acting President of the Synod, until the Synod itself appoints a President. Thus Kissi was in a strong position; if there were legally no Synod in existence, he was the right man (from the Patriarch's point of view) to form it; if there were a Synod, he was the proper Acting President upon the departure of Vissarion.

Somehow the first negotiations, in 1935, went wrong. They were resumed in 1936, and final agreement was reached in February 1937. The vexed question of the Bishops and their consecration was satisfactorily settled. Of the two Bishops consecrated by the Metropolitan of Pec, the more objectionable, Vissarion, had gone; the Patriarch agreed to recognise the other, and also the third irregular Bishop, whom the two consecrated at Pec had themselves consecrated to fill the See of Korea. These recognitions, with Kissi's unchallenged consecration, accounted for three of the five Albanian Bishops. For the remaining two, it was possible to find two Albanian clerics in Greece, of a sufficiently high standard of theological education to satisfy the Patriarch. These were then consecrated, by the Patriarch's authority, and the Albanian Synod was now complete. In April 1937 the Oecumenical Patriarch duly issued his decree or "tomos", establishing the Church of Albania, in the control of the Synod of five Bishops. The Synod elected Kristofor Kissi, Bishop of Tirana, their President; he thus became Archbishop of Tirana, and Primate of the Albanian Church.

Archbishop Kissi managed to keep in with the Italians after their occupation, sending Mussolini a somewhat fulsome telegram from Predappio. No doubt it was essential for a newly-established

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Church to follow the Orthodox habit of harmony between Church and State. Autocephaly was hardly won, and must not be endangered.

The Orthodox Church in Albania has one Archbishop; the Roman Catholic, with about half the membership, maintains two.

CHAPTER TEN

Ministers, Ancient and Modern

AFTER his accession to the throne, King Zog discontinued the practice of being his own Prime Minister. The Premier of the first two Royal Governments was Kostaq Kotta, and of the next three, Pandeli Evangheli. Then came the "New Gang" Government of Mehdi Frasheri, after which the "Old Gang" was restored to power under Kostaq Kotta. With the exception of Frasheri's Cabinet, these were all re-shuffles of substantially the same team, with a new man tried occasionally, and the old stagers every now and then retiring for a year or so, to come back at the next re-shuffle.

Kostaq Kotta was known as a pro-Italian, and was put in whenever good relations with Italy were desired. Ekrem Libohova, the Court Chamberlain, who was with the King in the episode on the steps of the Vienna Opera House, was another pro-Italian—some people considered him as hardly distinguishable from an Italian—and was from time to time made Foreign Minister, particularly when good relations with Italy were the order of the day. However, when the show-down came, in 1939, he showed by his conduct that he was a loyal Albanian.

The King seldom felt really safe without Musa Yuka, a tough old politician, as Minister of the Interior. After the Northern Rebellion, Musa Yuka was employed upon the essential clean-up of malcontents; he was then dropped for a time, but came back when the first Ministry of the new monarchy was formed. His special function latterly was the "making" of elections.

In October 1935 King Zog tried the experiment of a "New Gang" Cabinet. The Premier was Mehdi Frasheri, an elderly idealist, and the other Ministers were young men, new to power, who were now for the first time given their chance. They represented a more modern tendency, and a generation which had not inherited

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the ideas of the Turks. The "Old Gang" statesmen insisted (and Ekrem Libohova, himself only in middle age, made a point of it when conversing with me) that there was no difference between the one group of men and the other; that the division of Albanian public men into "Old" and "New" was fictitious. Libohova said he was not conscious of any difference between the Government of which he was a member and the Frasheri Government which had preceded it, except, possibly, in points of detail. On the other hand, Albanian diplomatic representatives in Western Europe all assured one that there was this division, and that the King favoured the young. Zog himself mentioned to me the advantage to the administration of the growing band of young men whose education had been received after the departure of the Turks. Be that as it may, it is considered by competent observers who lived and worked in Albania that the Frasheri administration was the best Albania ever had. It only lasted a year.

Mehdi Frasheri was by now an elderly man, with a long political career. In April 1914 he was Albanian representative at the Valona Conference of the Great Powers, which sought to launch the Albanian Principality. In 1919 he was Minister of the Interior, in 1922 Minister of Public Works—usually a lucrative post, but Frasheri enjoyed an enviable reputation for complete personal integrity. At this time he represented Albania at Geneva. From 1930 till 1931 he served as Minister of Public Economies, and was subsequently President of the Council of State (the Upper Chamber). An honest man was an invaluable asset in Zog's administrations; and Frasheri was not only honest, but a man of relatively modern outlook. I conversed with him in Tirana, and found that he talked in terms of late nineteenth-century Liberalism. What was remarkable was not so much that he should believe in honest administration, liberty, and constitutional forms, and desire them to come about in his country; nor even that, in a land which was run on lines far more antiquated than those of the nineteenth century, he should be confident that modern methods were sure to come; it was rather that he cherished the illusion that modern methods *were already in*

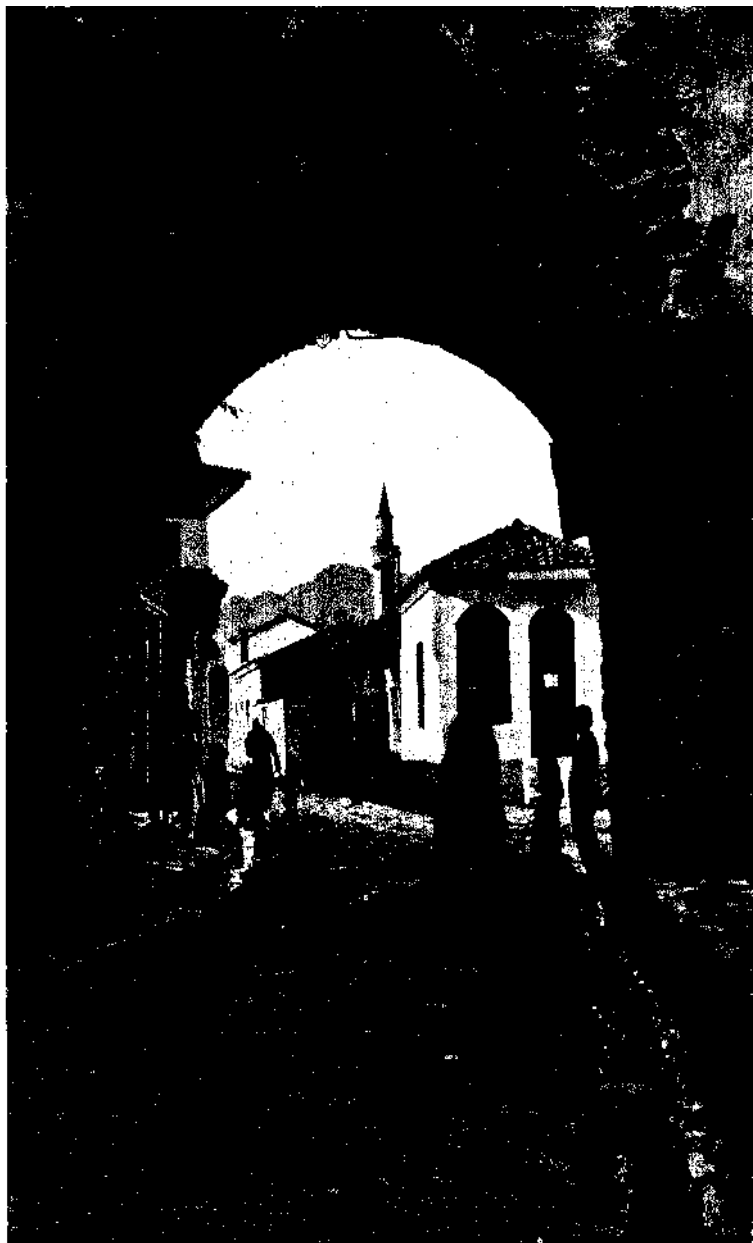
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operation. Frasheri's idealism, and the rise of his team of young men, untainted with the legacy of the Sultans, keen, competent, honest, brought into the Albanian Whitehall a breath of free air, and led to notable improvements in the practical day-to-day administration. This great-hearted old idealist is now in an Italian prison.

The Minister of the Interior in Frasheri's Government was a young man named Etem Toto. He had emerged from the best of all administrative schools, the Gendarmerie, of which he had been an officer. The King made him Prefect of Scutari, where he was again a success; and at the Ministry of the Interior he did nothing to diminish his reputation. When the Frasheri Government resigned, Toto retired, still a poor man (a great test of honesty in Albania), to his little house near Valona, there to live quietly until the King should again have need of his services. Unfortunately, he was not allowed to live in peace; in June 1937 he was announced to have risen suddenly in rebellion against the Government. The rising, quite unprepared, was put down in two days, and Etem Toto was killed in the fighting. A number of persons were afterwards shot for complicity, including Etem's brother, Isem Toto.

Without further evidence, this story is inexplicable. Toto was no bandit, no would-be usurper, no ambitious chieftain. His future career depended upon the favour of the King. His whole training, in the Gendarmerie, and as Prefect and Minister, disposed him to the side of law and order, and the putting down of risings. Upright and competent administrators do not go in for irresponsible rebellion. Had he, for some reason, thought it necessary to head a revolution, he would have prepared it carefully. What does it mean?

If Toto really rebelled, and has not simply been slandered by powerful enemies, there is only one explanation: he must have been threatened and persecuted to the point that his life was plainly forfeit, and armed resistance was the last expedient of a desperate man. It is perfectly possible that his successor-in-office, or the King's favourite, or some other powerful enemy, "laid for him", and drove him, unwillingly, into revolt. It is equally possible that Toto



Elbasan: town gateway.

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was murdered, and the story of his resistance was a put-up job. In a graft-ridden country it is likely enough that someone in a high position sought revenge for Toto's lack of complaisance, when in office, towards corrupt methods; or thought it well to eliminate, while the going was good, a man who, at the next turn of the political wheel, might become a good deal too powerful for the comfort of grafters and vested interests. Etem Toto was a reformer, a cleaner-up. The number of such men is so small that the loss of one outstanding example is a disaster. That such a thing could happen at all is a shocking indication that the methods of government *in* the Albanian monarchy had not yet been purified.

The story of Toto's untimely end has drawn me ahead of my tale, which is at the moment concerned with the period of office of the Frasheri Government. Before leaving Toto, however, there is a story to be told of his conduct while in office. This episode occurred in September 1936, a little while before the fall of the Government.

There fell due in the autumn of 1936 the periodical parliamentary elections. Part of the normal procedure in Albania was for the Minister of the Interior to give the district Prefects certain instructions about the men whom the King would wish to see elected. Etem Toto sent round an extremely confidential circular to his Prefects. Through some unanticipated leakage (no doubt contrived for the undoing of Toto) the contents of the circular appeared soon after, with editorial comments, in "Bessa", a Tirana newspaper!

More serious than the embarrassment caused to Etem Toto was the fury of the King, who informed his Minister that he must forthwith trace the leakage and have the offending person punished. If Toto failed in this duty, it would be the end of his political career, at least under King Zog. Toto had no idea who was responsible, but he sent for the editor of the newspaper; this was a well-known "Old Gang" Minister, Abdurrahman Dibra, who had been in and out of office since the return of Zog from exile, and had been Minister of Finance in the administration preceding Frasheri's.

In due course Excellency Abdurrahman Dibra presented himself

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at the office of Excellency Etem Toto. He was not arrested or murdered; but he found his opponent no easy game. Etem Toto behaved with considerable sportsmanship.

"Are you armed?" asked the Minister of the Interior.

"No", replied the ex-Minister of Finance.

Etem Toto placed two revolvers on his desk. "Here you are", he said. "A revolver for you, and a revolver for me. Now, I want you to disclose the name of the person who communicated my circular to your paper. If you do not care to do so, one of us two will not leave this room alive."

Abdurrahman Dibra saw no occasion for "rough stuff"; he gave the required information. Unfortunately, the answer was as one might have expected; the culprit was Abdurrahman Krosi, the King's favourite and evil genius, corrupter of the springs of justice and honest administration, and best-hated man in Albania. Etem Toto reported accordingly to the King, and no action was taken.

Another conspicuous member of the "New Gang" was the Foreign Minister, Fuad Aslani, an eager, intelligent young man, who speaks several languages, including English, extremely well. His university education was gained at Vienna, and at one time he was Albanian Minister in London. His outstanding feature was his confidence; his colleagues became somewhat tired of always hearing that Aslani could do their jobs for them better than they themselves. However, he was genuinely able, and one can forgive a certain over-confidence in a good man who is given his first chance. If he threw himself with vigour into responsible work, it must be admitted that there was much to be done. His great regret, on leaving office, was that the time had been too short for greater achievements, and so much of it had been taken up with visits to Geneva.

The outstanding event of Aslani's tenure of office was the settlement with Italy; this has already been described in an earlier chapter. It was very possibly this agreement that led the King to decide upon a change of Government, so that the pro-Italians, Kotta and Libohova, might have a chance to smooth over the

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resuming of severed contacts. Aslani had also to pay several visits to Geneva, where he attended the annual Assembly of the League of Nations and had further to cope with one of Greece's periodical complaints about the minority schools in South Albania for the Greeks resident there.

The Frasheri-Aslani-Toto Government took office at an interesting moment in Albanian affairs, when there was an opportunity for making a favourable agreement with Italy, as durable as any agreement could be when Mussolini was one of the signatories; moreover, there were schemes of improvement on hand in Albania itself, and to these the Government gave further impetus. Aslani told me that they were particularly interested in the King's plan for simultaneously reducing the military budget and improving the standard of agriculture, by turning some of the conscripts into agricultural students, and later using them as agricultural instructors. The administration also took up the project of setting up an agricultural bank, but this had not reached completion when the Frasheri Government fell from power.

Most appropriately, the Government of the Liberal, constitutional, democratic Frasheri fell from office by the normal procedure of parliamentary democracy; it resigned, following a vote of no confidence. (The vote, of course, was inspired by the King when he wished to change his Ministers.) The "New Gang" had been in office for just under a year. Several considerations no doubt induced the King to decide that the time had come to return one set of politicians to the shelf, and to put another set in office. For one thing, nineteenth-century Liberalism, as preached by Mehdi Frasheri, must be administered to a fifteenth-century country in small doses. Then, too, there were the forthcoming elections to be "made", and Etem Toto had had ill-luck with his circular. Relations with Italy called for an Italophil, not an Anglophil, at the Foreign Office; Aslani, who had been Minister in London, was replaced by Libohova, and it was Libohova who, in May 1937, went to London as the representative of King Zog and attended the Coronation of King George the Sixth. Relations between Italy

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and Britain were by no means happy at this period; so back to Kostaq Kotta, Ekrem Libohova, and Musa Yuka. The "New Gang" experiment was, for the moment, ended. Time and the Italians did not permit of its later resumption.

A word should be said about the "pro-Italianism" of some of the "Old Gang" politicians. In Albania, where political and administrative corruption were still rife, and Ministers made fortunes in devious ways, there was always a tendency to make wild assertions that this or that Minister had "sold out" to the Italians, and was receiving foreign gold. It did not at all follow that a pro-Italian statesman was in fact receiving presents from Italy, though he might be; indeed, he might be doing so with the knowledge and approval of the King. To be pro-Italian meant to favour collaboration with Italy, which was an obvious necessity; it need not imply putting Italy before Albania. Libohova, for example, who was reputed to be a pro-Italian, left Albania with the King when the invaders arrived. He subsequently paid a private visit to Italy, and was shut up by the Italians. It was by no means unnatural that a man who had received an Italian education, and understood the Italian language and people, and possibly even owned property in Italy, should have a preference for Italian civilization, as against that of other Western countries which he did not personally know. From an economic point of view, good relations with Italy were extremely desirable; she furnished a much more hopeful market for Albanian goods than did Yugoslavia or Greece, which produced much the same commodities as did Albania. Moreover, Italy was the only country which took sufficient interest in Albania (founded upon geography and her idea of her own security) to subsidise and otherwise assist her small neighbour. That Italy intended, in her own good time, to seize Albania altogether is hardly relevant, for no policy could well have averted this end. The League of Nations had become powerless, the Western Powers were not interested, and the Balkan Entente would not admit Albania. The difference between the alleged "pro-" and "anti-" Italians was simply one of degree, and of tactics; and the ultimate arbiter of Albanian

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policy towards Italy was the King of the Albanians, and no other.

In view of the future foreign problems of Albania, I asked the King his attitude to a possible Balkan Federation. He at once replied that Albania would immediately join it. Indeed, he said, Albania wanted to join the Balkan Entente, but was refused by the other members, from fear of Italy. It was not Albania, he said, but her neighbours who feared Italy so much that they would not risk offending her by allowing Albania to join their group. This answer seems to me to hold out considerable hope for the future, when Italy has been defeated, and the Balkans are once again for the Balkan peoples.

How King Zog Governed

THE government of an extremely backward country, in the modern world, without adequate supplies of money or of trained personnel, is a task of immense difficulty. Of King Zog's regime it is impossible to form a totally favourable, but still less a totally unfavourable opinion; he contended with adverse circumstances, and he made some sort of a showing. He did not have a fair chance, with Italy impeding his every effort.

It is perhaps fair to King Zog to quote two statements which may be regarded as specimens of his own ideas, and to represent something of the direction in which he tended to move. They date from January 1929, when he had recently become King, and the first is extracted from his instructions to his Cabinet. They were to proceed with the following projects:—

1. To send students to foreign universities.
2. To make provision for the better education of women.
3. To construct irrigation canals, so as to increase the area of cultivable land.
4. To abolish the Moslem Sabbath, substituting Sunday as the universal day of rest; but Moslems to be given time off on Fridays for their devotions.

At the same time the King exhorted his Civil Servants in the following somewhat high-flown terms:—

"Never forget that every citizen applying to you for help is part of the Sovereign People that employs you." An admirable precept, which doubtless fell on stony ground; but many Western Civil Services cannot claim to follow it in their dealings with the public.

The first necessity in Albania was to maintain tranquillity throughout the country. Until Zog came to power, every year saw



Elbasan : the fort.

How King Zog Governed

its rebellion, generally serious, frequently successful. Continuity of policy was totally impossible in these conditions. Law and order can hardly be said to have existed. Zog asserted his authority to such effect that the Northern Rebellion of 1926 was the last that seriously threatened his power; the later risings in the South and elsewhere hardly exceeded in dimensions the isolated acts of desperate men, or raids by brigands. Indeed, it was only the hostile press of his neighbours that dignified them by the name of rebellions.

Brigandage used to be endemic; Zog and Musa Yuka reduced it to the smallest dimensions. The vendetta became a mere survival, not the custom of the country. Tribesmen, who before Zog's time went armed as a matter of course, now yielded up their rifles; 180,000 of them were collected by the Government over a period of 14 years. Only the village headman was allowed to go armed; and, of course, arms were possessed by the Mati and the Dibra tribes, as an insurance against revolution.

Order is the first necessity of a State. Zog, it must be granted, had achieved it. The building of roads, the telephone, the establishment from 1925 onwards of an efficient British-organised Gendarmerie, ensured such peace and good order in the country as it had never previously known.

The second requirement is Law, without which order is but repression. We have seen that Zog introduced new Civil and Penal Codes soon after his accession. The weakness here was in law-enforcement. King Zog's power depended upon his personal rule, and if a man was a supporter of the King, a certain licence was allowed him in breaking the law. Thus, the conviction of a murderer might be, and sometimes was, prevented or quashed by orders from Tirana. A certain captain at Elbasan was brought to trial, with a very strong case against him, for a particularly sordid murder. The trial began, but the prisoner enjoyed "protection" in high quarters, and the Court received orders from Tirana to stop the trial and release the captain. In the Mati district there were known to be living a number of men "wanted" by the Gendarmerie, but who could not be touched because they were "King's

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men". Often the Gendarmerie would expend endless toil and ingenuity, and even lose lives, in order to capture some brigand or robber, only to have him released with a royal pardon. The effect upon the Gendarmerie was to give them a strong incentive to catch their prisoner dead.

This interference with the course of justice was not due to a mere whim, or to dislike of justice, on the part of the King; it had a definite purpose. It used to be said in Austria that when a man was recommended to the late Emperor Francis Joseph for important promotion in the service of the Dual Monarchy, the Emperor would ask about the candidate's loyalty. On being informed that the man was a good Austrian, he added: "But is he loyal to *me*?" The same consideration of necessity animated King Zog, who could forgive much to a dependable supporter of his own.

The Oriental method of rule is to play off each person and each interest against another. In this way, everybody requires protection against a rival, and depends upon the King. Moreover, any too ambitious man has always rivals ready to denounce him or to keep him in check. King Zog used to play off a district Prefect against the Gendarmerie commander, one Minister against another, Moslem against Christian, Catholic against Orthodox, Italian against Yugoslav, Army against Gendarmerie, tribe against tribe. One tribe he could never afford to offend, and that was his own. The Mati could bear arms, shelter malefactors, do much as they liked; for the Mati, of whom he was hereditary Chief, could be depended upon to pay for their position of privilege by bringing their rifles to the support of the King in any emergency. And, just in case anything went wrong in that quarter, there was another tribe near at hand to play off against the Mati; the Dibra tribe were also allowed to keep their arms.

Ruling in the Near and Middle East, especially in Moslem countries, and the lands lately ruled by Turkey, is essentially the art of dealing with *people*. Macchiavelli, King Solomon, Haroun-al-Raschid, well understood the game. First you make the fullest enquiries about a man's abilities and loyalty. You have him spied

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upon, to see that he is not too friendly with, let us say, the Yugoslav or the Italian Legation. Then you give him a good job, and treat him with apparent confidence. After a bit you sack him, to ensure that he shall realise his complete dependence upon the throne. Presently you relent, and put him back in office, always, however, making sure that you know what he is doing, and that some rival of his shall have every opportunity of catching him out if he leaves the beaten track. If he strikes up a friendship with another functionary, you move one of them to a remote station. This is personal rule, and it is the way in which King Zog retained control of Albania for more than fourteen years. It sounds unpleasant to an Englishman, but it is better than frequent rebellions and insecurity.

An example of the strange things which happen in a country at this stage of development is the incident of the Treasury pilferings. One day in October 1932 the King discovered that certain sums belonging to the State were missing. At once armed guards were placed over the Treasury, and not even the Minister of Finance could go in. Investigation of the contents of the vaults revealed a deficiency of considerable size. (The "Morning Post" gave the figure as over £100,000.) A number of officials of the Taxation Department were forthwith arrested, pending investigation.

It is no vain imagining that every hand is against a ruler, unless that hand is disarmed and watched, or greased. There were in Albania plenty of people who disliked the modernising of life, the enrichment of politicians, the collecting of taxes, the enforcement of laws, the suppression of brigandage and the vendetta, or the prospect of "Agricultural Reform". There were Christians who could be stirred against a Moslem King; patriots who could be inflamed against an alleged Italianiser; and the disappointed rivals, former victims, disgruntled and disappointed men, who were quite ready to oppose the King if they thought they could get away with it. It was Zog's job to see that they did not get away with it; and (until the Italians turned him out) he was notably successful.

One of the most unpleasant and, in the long run, disastrous

features of this kind of regime is the almost inevitable Court camarilla. King Zog had an unpleasant favourite named Abdurrahman Krosi, much hated, and the centre of all sorts of intrigues. As is the way with such persons, he had his own clientele of friends and favourites, for whom he would exercise a sort of reflected power of protection, importuning **the** King when necessary. His rivals were in danger; for example, his share in the matter of the circular probably helped in the fall of Etem Toto. Krosi is elderly and in ill-health, and is no longer with the King. On the more genuinely political side, the King depended much upon Musa Yuka. With regard to some of the men close to Zog, one is reminded of Napoleon's dictum about Talleyrand: "The biggest scoundrel in Europe, but I cannot do without him."

Albania was, of course, nowhere near advanced enough to be capable of enjoying genuine democracy. What it did have was a great advance on Turkish rule. The working of the Constitution was an interesting combination of the forms of democracy with the reality of a not unpopular despotism. The King in fact decided what was to be done in Parliament, and the Deputies took their cue from him or his spokesman. When the King desired to change his Ministers, he simply dismissed one Government and installed another, drawn from the reserve of available men. In the case of the Frashen Ministry, however, the King suited the technique of dismissal to the ideas of his Ministers. Frasheri behaved in parliamentary procedure, and the responsibility of a Cabinet to Parliament; very well, he was dismissed by the proper parliamentary forms. Some relatively trivial and non-controversial matter was being debated, when a Deputy arose and made a fierce attack upon the Ministry. The other Deputies, sensing that this attack would not have been made without royal inspiration, joined in. Soon the question of confidence was put, and the Ministry (which not long before had received an unanimous vote of confidence) was defeated. It accordingly resigned, and the King, with perfect correctness, accepted its resignation.

In just such a way, the Lancastrian or the Tudor Parliament

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voted what the King desired; a complacent Parliament thus laid the precedents for a later Parliament to assert its rights *against* the King. Under William and Mary, Anne, and the early Georges, votes were produced in a somewhat similar manner to that which upset Frasheri; though in those days there was already a party system, which in Albania was entirely lacking. Possibly the precedent of Frasheri's dismissal may be used in some future time as the basis of a claim that Albanian Ministries are responsible to Parliament, and not to the King!

In the absence of political parties (for all attachments, allegiances, differences were personal, and not ideological or truly political or sectional) the Parliament was an assemblage of mere individuals. What is more important, these individuals were hand-picked by the King. Elections were held in two stages. The individual voters assembled at the Maine of the village, to appoint "electors" for the secondary elections. A week or two after the "primaries", the "electors" chosen in the "primaries" gathered at the district Prefecture to do the real electing—the choosing of the actual Deputies who were to represent them in Parliament. They found that the Prefect was ready to instruct them for whom they were to vote; the King had sent down his list, via the Ministry of the Interior. When the electors had recorded their votes for the official nominees (there were no others) they went home. The election was over. The people had ratified the King's choice of Deputies.

It would perhaps have been better if the King (or his Minister of the Interior) had offered a choice of candidates to the electors, so that they might exercise a more active function in the choosing of their representatives. On the other hand, this might merely have muddled them. There is no doubt that these artificial elections achieved two definite results: they enabled the King to ascertain that there was no serious, earnest, determined opposition to his method of governing; and they prevented the election of brigands, demagogues, irresponsible persons, hidden traitors, or personal enemies of the King, who, had they been elected to Parliament, might have grossly abused their position, to the detriment of the

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King's authority and of the security of the State. One wonders indeed what amazing results would have been produced by genuinely "free" elections; probably the task of government would have been rendered totally impossible.

It is clear that one, at least, of the objects of preserving democratic forms was to impress the outside world. This explains the King's anger at the bungle over Etem Toto's circular. It does not follow, however, that an accelerated tempo in modernisation of governmental methods would be a good thing. Too swift change is liable to provoke reaction, which sometimes defeats the reformer. Not every country is ready for the strong meat which Mustafa Kemal administered to Turkey; and Haile Selassie (who, like King Zog, has also had his country temporarily overrun by the Italians) is a better model than Amanullah. On the other hand, there are not lacking young and able Albanians who consider that the King was over-cautious, and that Albania was ready for much stronger meat than he dared administer.

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ONE of King Zog's difficulties was to find the right men, who would help him to modernise his country, without his relinquishing that strong grasp upon authority which was essential. He found a country but lately emerged from Turkish rule, with all the corruption and other faults which the Turkish system implied. In the dozen years between the overthrow of the Turks and the attainment of power by Zog, the country had experienced several foreign occupations, several local or ephemeral Governments, and, for the rest, lawlessness. Some of its men were accustomed to rule—but according to Turkish standards, now abandoned by Turkey herself; the others were used only to oppose authority, whencesoever it might spring.

Only three or four years ago, the Assembly of the League of Nations was discussing a Report of the Mandates Commission on the administration of Palestine. There arose a delegate who claimed special knowledge, by reason of having once been Governor of Palestine. This was no other than the delegate of Albania, Mehdi Frasheri, who, before the Great War, had governed Palestine for a time under the Turkish Sultan. *The Hamidian despotism is as near to us as that.* This kind of man was the material that Zog found ready to his hand when he was looking for administrators, Ministers, diplomatic representatives, officials, Prefects. As well appoint the present British Cabinet to be Commissars in a Soviet State, as expect these relics of the Ottoman Empire to introduce modern administrative standards in Albania, or to keep to them personally if they were established.

The first principle of the State Service in Turkish times was, "Muzzle not the ox that treadeth out the corn". Moreover, the overlapping careers of bureaucracy and politics were looked upon—

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and still are looked upon over wide stretches of the globe, including parts of the British Empire—as the authentic path by which a poverty-stricken peasant may rise to influence and affluence. It was the Albanian peasant who became a Moslem, and placed his talents at the service of the Sultan, who stood the best chance of ending up as a Pasha, a Viceroy, or a Grand Vizier. Both in lapse of time and in religion, Albania is the least removed of all the Balkan countries from the Ottoman Empire and its traditions.

The young man who wants to get on enters the public service. Even Tribal Chieftain Zog made his career by serving the Regency as Commander-in-Chief and Minister of the Interior, and thus came to power. The peasant gets a job in a Ministry or a Prefect's office, and goes forward from there. His salary will be extremely small; there will be a large deduction for "National Economy"—in other words, to enable the King to get along for a while without another Italian loan. Some years ago the salary often did not arrive at all; in any case, it would not be large.

That is the other main cause of the trouble. A country as poor as Albania—or as stingy as Hamidian Turkey—cannot offer generous salaries to its Civil Servants; they must reward themselves "on the side" as they go along. The beginning of fortune is to extract a *douceur* from a petitioner, for procuring him an interview with the official whom he has come to see. Before you get to the Prefect or the Magistrate or the Minister, who has power to settle your business, you give a present to the clerk who admits you. If you do not, the clerk states that the Minister is engaged; and the Minister never knows that you have called.

The higher positions give even greater opportunities. Imagine yourself a Minister, about to award a contract for laying a large number of concrete blocks in the sea at Durazzo, in the form of a pier. Italy has just advanced the money—on which you will, of course, draw liberally for "expenses". Your brother-in-law has got some concrete, or knows where to get some, and the bill will not be too closely scrutinised. Dishonest? Yes, but how is a man to live? A Cabinet Minister's salary is thirty pounds a month; what sort of



Elbasan : the noonday rest.

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a career is **that** going **to** provide? **Next month the King will perhaps** dismiss you, and there is no pension. Moreover, you are **now** the prosperous member of your family; your relations are all clamouring for sinecures, subsidies, pensions, jobs, contracts, or Heaven knows what. You need a new European suit to receive foreign journalists; a frock coat to attend the King's banquet; an endless supply of smokable cigarettes. Living is cheap? Yes, but not so cheap if you live as an European. Finally, you have to live somewhere. At home in the mountains you were brought up in a shack; that won't do for Tirana. What you need is to buy a plot of land in the Boulevard Zog and build a nice modern villa, with a garden and a wall round it. That costs money; lots of money. Your capital is represented by a few pounds that you managed to save (if you did) while you were Assistant Prefect in a provincial town. So how are these things to be paid for? Well, there is this contract for the totally unnecessary Durazzo breakwater, which the Italians are so keen about. What about a rake-off?

There are two preoccupations in the mind of the Minister. The first is his rake-off; the second, how to create the necessary alliances, window-dressing for the King, and so forth, to make likely a further spell of power after the first. This costs money too, so let's take a little more on the rake-off!

At risk of weariness, it must be repeated that this window-dressing, sweetening, and rake-off are not new sins specially developed by the Albanians; they are the legacy of centuries. In Turkish times, *everybody* who was not content to mind the cattle in his village, or grow things for a bare livelihood, *always* lived on the rake-off, be he Pasha, tax-gatherer, official's clerk or servant, or merely a local magistrate dealing with the landed Bey. Since, when Albania became independent, everybody remembered that, when he was young, everybody took a rake-off or a bribe as a matter of course, the social conscience which condemns these things practically did not exist—at least among the class which first found itself in the Albanian public service. Nor could Zog create that conscience by removing temptation, except at the cost of filling his empty

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Treasury with an Italian loan—on Italy's terms. Often he did so fill his Treasury; but it did not last long. For the same reason, all his other excellent schemes, for land reform, agricultural banks, agricultural and other education, and Heaven knows what improvements, were perpetually held up, and were spread over decades, when a single year would have sufficed in a less penurious country.

The conditions of the service being what they were, everybody was willing to point the finger at somebody else for taking bribes—particularly if he himself, not being in the public service, had no opportunity to get rich that way, and only endured despoliation as a tax-payer and a briber. People used to speculate upon the honesty or otherwise of this or that official. The test was simple. Mr. So-and-so came to office a poor man; we all know his father and mother, and their miserable farm. He has been in office for a few years, and has now resigned. Is he a rich man, or is he still poor? Does he go quietly back to the family farm, like Etem Toto? Or has he built himself a nice house, and does he continue to cut a dash in Tirana? A British politician might get away with his increased wealth, on the ground that an admiring old lady had left him a fortune, or he had won a packet on a double, and increased his winnings on the Stock Exchange; or he might have been made (between bouts of office) a company director, with generous fees; or he might have written a book or two, or some sensational and well-paid newspaper articles. In a word, the poor man in politics may become moderately rich without serious (or even any) dishonesty. It is not so in Albania. If the once poor public servant has got him a nice house, the price of it can only have come, some way or another, out of the public purse, or out of bribes; the emoluments of office would not run to it, and there is no Stock Exchange, no well-paid journalism, to account honestly for the money.

While some Ministers were supposed to make a good thing out of the Ministry of Finance or the Ministry of Public Works, others, such as Mehdi Frasheri and Etem Toto, enjoyed a reputation for complete honesty. It should be said at once that, particularly of late years, there was an increasing number of genuinely honest

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men in the public service; the Gendarmerie, the schools, residence at Western universities, and the fundamental excellence of the native Albanian character, were producing a generation with an enlightened outlook. One meets Albanians in this country now, exiled with their Sovereign, upon whose principles and personal integrity, as well as their enlightened intellectual views, one would confidently rely. But not all Albanians looked with the same eyes upon an honest public servant; a few years ago one such man died, as poor as he began, and a bystander at his funeral remarked, with pity for such eccentricity: "There goes another fool!"

It would be grossly unfair to leave the impression that the whole collection of Albanian politicals was riddled with graft and speculation. If the picture has been overdrawn in this chapter, it serves to show what King Zog had to contend with. Helped by the various agencies mentioned above, and by the effluxion of time, he succeeded in effecting notable improvement. That his task was not completed is due to the Italians, who obstructed his work all along the line, and finally cut it short.

The Mouse is Devoured

ON Wednesday, April 5th 1939, Queen Geraldine of the Albanians gave birth to a son. The Queen was 22 years old, half American and half Hungarian by birth, extremely beautiful, and loved by the Albanians. The King was now 44, a handsome, upstanding man. The birth of a Crown Prince—named Skander, after Skanderbeg—seemed to promise the establishment of a permanent dynasty, which should rule Albania, and develop from her warring sections a single, modernised people. The event was saluted by the firing of 101 guns, and popular rejoicing.

Two days later, on Good Friday, 7th April, the Queen and her new-born baby were being trundled over deplorable roads to the Greek frontier in an ambulance. The Italian "ally", whose Foreign Minister had been best man at the Albanian royal wedding a year earlier, had grown tired of mere "alliance", and invaded the country with a considerable army and 400 aeroplanes. A day later the King also left, joining at Fiorina an exhausted woman with a high temperature, whose spirit, however, enabled her to recover, even from a long and rough journey two days after childbirth.

It was three years since Mehdi Frasheri and Fuad Aslani had negotiated with the Italians in Rome the settlement of Italo-Albanian relations. That autumn Kostaq Kotta had become Prime Minister and was still in office at the moment of the invasion. Early in March new negotiations were begun for a further adjustment of relations. It appears that further bribes were offered to Albania, including a large sum for the King himself. The price this time was to be a considerable limitation of Albanian independence. Italy was to exercise wide administrative control, and to plant Italian colonists in Albania. The Ethiopian War and the Spanish War were over, and Mussolini was free to resume his forward policy in Albania;

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moreover, Germany had taken Prague a few weeks earlier, and it was Italy's turn to annex a country. Well might King Zog have said of the Italians: "Timeo Danaos, dona ferentes". Always a patriotic defender of the fundamental interests of his people, he once again returned to the Italian demands a courageous "NO!"

In the first week of April there was much diplomatic coming and going. King Zog had appointed a new Minister to Rome; an aide-de-camp of his own, that General Sereggi who had fired upon the King's would-be-assassin in Vienna. This Minister took up his duties in Rome; then flew back to Tirana with Signor Jacomoni, the Italian Minister to Albania; then both men flew once again to Rome; all within the space of a few days. All over Europe Foreign Ministers were asking the Italian Ambassadors what was happening. Belgrade was distinctly anxious, but received assurances from the Italians. Greece, recently guaranteed by Great Britain, feared an Italian occupation of Corfu. The Italians replied by asking the British whether *they* had any similar intention. Meanwhile, General Pariani, once Inspector-General of the Albanian Army, but now Minister for War in Rome, was up at Innsbruck, conferring with his German opposite number, General von Keitel. The British Minister at Durazzo, Sir Andrew Ryan, reported on Thursday, April 6th, the arrival there of an Italian cruiser and two smaller vessels.

In the small hours of Good Friday morning, the Italian fleet appeared in strength off four Albanian ports, San Giovanni di Medua in the north, Durazzo in the centre, Valona in the south, and Santi Quaranta in the extreme south. In each case attempts were made to land troops, but the local Albanians resisted. The ports were shelled with naval guns, and bombed from the air, and the four Italian columns were duly landed, after heavy fighting. At Durazzo, the Gendarmerie played a big part in the battle. They waited until the Italians had disembarked upon the concrete break-water, and then they opened on them with machine-guns, inflicting very heavy casualties; the numbers of killed admitted afterwards by the Italians fell far short of the truth.

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The troops from Durazzo fell back upon Tirana, fighting another battle on the way, and blowing up an important bridge on the Durazzo-Tirana road. Tribesmen of every faith and faction procured arms—the King had endeavoured to arm the people a few days earlier, but he was too late—and rallied to their King and their country. But rifles and machine-guns cannot answer battleships and bombing aeroplanes. The Italians landed troops by 'plane on Tirana aerodrome; they dropped leaflets in Tirana and all over the country; they did a little machine-gunning, to strike terror into the populace. Resistance lasted for about a week; but on the second day the King and his entourage realised the hopelessness of the position, and left for Greece.

The Albanian Parliament had a little while previously unanimously rejected the terms offered by Italy, supporting in this the patriotic policy of their King. The Italians managed to get together some sort of Assembly, which they named a Constituent, and induced it to offer the Crown of Albania to King Victor Emmanuel. In Victor Emmanuel's name, Signor Jacomoni was promoted from Minister to Lieutenant-General of Albania; behind him stood the Commander-in-Chief of the Italian armed forces in Albania, who in fact controlled the country. A puppet government of Albanians was set up, to do the Italians' bidding; its head, the Prime Minister of *'autonomous" Albania, is Shefqet Vrlaci, the ex-prospective father-in-law, ex-ally, and more recent enemy of King Zog.

The Italians quickly set themselves to the work of turning Albania into a Fascist State. A Chamber of Corporations was formed, though how they managed to construct any Corporations (except perhaps on paper) is a mystery. The "Albanian Fascist Party" was launched, with a certain Tewfik Mborja as Secretary. The local branches of the Albanian "Fascists" rule the countryside; and the Italian "advisers" of these branches rule the Albanian "Fascists". Albania's foreign affairs were put into the hands of an Albanian Office, which was a department of the Italian Foreign Office in Rome.

As soon as the Albanian Fascist Party was founded, all officials

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were required to join it, on pain of dismissal. Large numbers chose dismissal, and most of them were immediately imprisoned. Mehdi Frasheri, who sent an angry telegram of protest to Mussolini upon the invasion of Albania, was arrested by the Itals, and taken away to prison in Italy. Fuad Aslani sought refuge for a few days in one of the Legations, then emerged to live quietly as a private citizen. Ekrem Libohova stuck by the King, and followed him into exile. Later, having property in Italy, he went to visit it, Italy being not then at war. When Italy entered the war, Libohova was interned. The Albanian Minister in London, Dr. Lek Kurti, unable to obtain support from the Foreign Office for the continuance of his Legation, wound it up, and went away to Geneva, where he had earlier been Albanian delegate to the League of Nations. After some time, being an elderly man, he returned home to Albania. A satisfactory feature of the disaster was the elimination of the unfortunate influence of Abdurrahman Krosi. He left with the King, and eventually settled down in Istanbul. Old (he is about 70) and in bad health, he seems to have retired finally into private life.

The King of Albania remained for a month or so in Greece, pending the convalescence of his wife. While he was there, the Greek authorities cut him off from all communication with his subjects in Albania, and with his diplomatic representatives abroad. Eventually, the royal party, consisting of the King and Queen, the Crown Prince, the King's six sisters, two nieces, and nephew, journeyed by a roundabout route to Paris. It will be remembered that once on their journey they passed an uncomfortable night in the train, upon discovering that the only available hotel, in a town where they had intended to break their journey, was the Hotel de Rome! The Albanian royal family took up its quarters in France until the collapse in the summer of 1940; then they withdrew to London. The King's brother-in-law, the Hamidian Prince, left Paris for England, but missed the last boat at Bordeaux, and was obliged to remain in France.

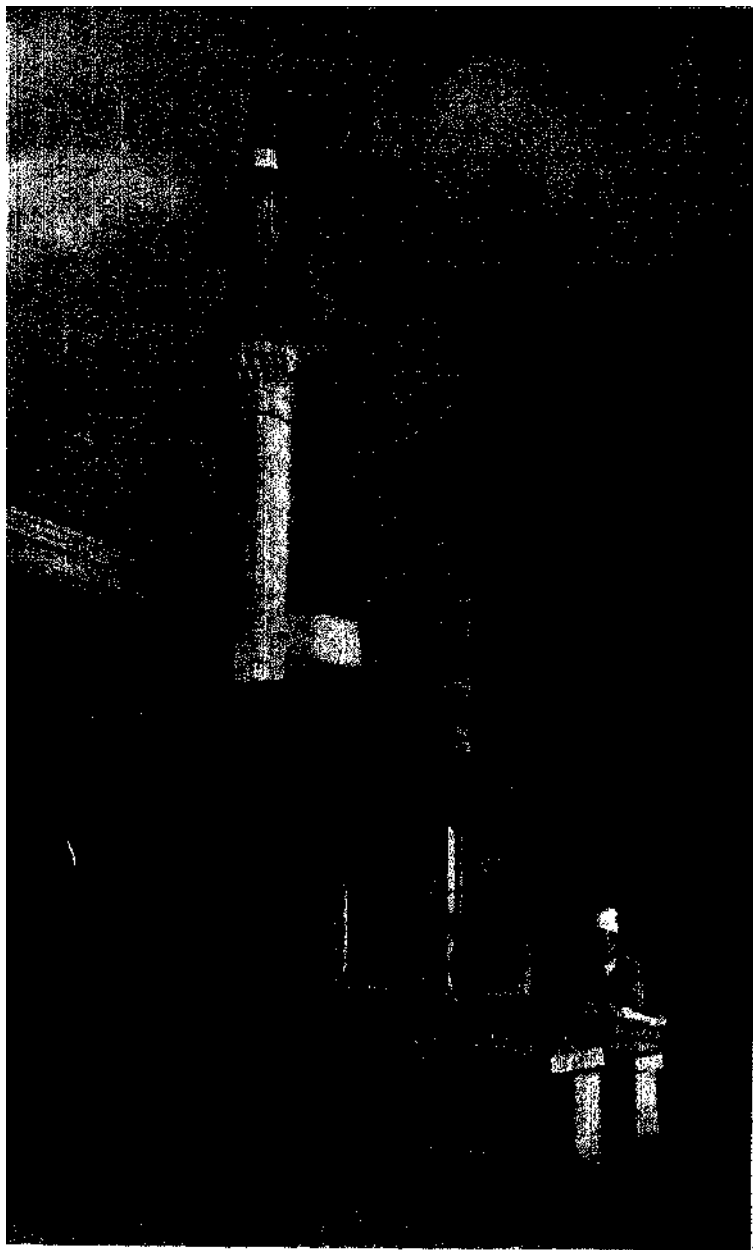
Risings have continued in Albania, but for the most part on a small scale. The Italians have shot or imprisoned various students

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in the more accessible parts of the country. Occasionally there is a tribal outbreak of some size, as in August 1940, when the Mati rose and blew up the important bridge over the River Mati, carrying the road from Tirana to Scutari. Italian forces were sent against them, and one or two battalions were completely wiped out before the tribesmen were subdued. Forty of the rebels were executed. Demonstrations on Albanian Independence Day, November 28th, occurred both in 1939 and 1940, and were visited with the murder of students, by way of reprisal. The Italians have attempted to conscript the Albanians for the Italian units of Victor Emmanuel's armies; but the conscripts in the less accessible North mostly went into hiding, and even the troops actually raised are undependable, since they are unable to change sides in the interests of their country's freedom.

The Italians now pushed on their preparations to use Albania as a base of operations for further activity in the Balkans. Large quantities of troops—it is said that there were as many as 300,000—were assembled in the country, and from time to time the Greeks were alarmed by concentrations near the Greek frontier. These rehearsals gave rise to diplomatic enquiries, and the troops were withdrawn, or at least reduced in number. In June 1940 Italy declared war upon Great Britain and France; but still she protested her friendship for Greece; indeed, in his speech declaring war, Mussolini went out of his way to assure neighbouring States, including specifically Greece, that he had not the slightest intention of attacking them.

Greece had received, and had not repudiated, a British guarantee of her integrity. Mussolini therefore set himself to cow the Greeks into abandoning this orientation of their policy, and incidentally to reduce their strength in advance of the outbreak of war. Italian aeroplanes dropped bombs "in error" upon Greek ships and Greek soil. An Italian submarine torpedoed and sank, in circumstances precluding any possibility of error, the best Greek warship, the old cruiser *Helle*, in which King George had returned to his country after twelve years of exile. The cruiser was engaged at the time in



A corner of Elbasan.

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attending the annual festivities of a saint's day on one of the Greek islands. Thousands of pilgrims were visiting the shrine of the saint; the island was *en fete*; the cruiser lay in the bay, dressed with flags. Suddenly she was torpedoed without warning. It is hardly likely that any other country would wish to reduce the strength of the Greek navy!

At last, on October 28th 1940, the Italian army in Albania crossed the frontier and invaded Greece. The procedure for declaring war was such as to leave the Greeks no alternative but immediate surrender or war. The Greek Premier was knocked up in the middle of the night by the Italian Minister, and presented with an ultimatum, to which he immediately replied, "I consider this a declaration of war". If the Italians had hoped that Greece would cave in and surrender, they had very badly mismanaged their diplomacy. So far from surrendering, the Greeks flew to arms, and a country ruled by a dictatorship became genuinely united behind the man who, whatever his faults, had prepared his country for defence.

The invasion of Greece did not go according to plan. An Italian column advancing on Metsovo got caught in the gorges of the Pindus, for all the world like the Roman army at the Caudine Forks. This defeat was succeeded by repulses all along the line. In an extraordinarily gallant and skilful campaign, aided by the British air force, the Greeks pushed the Italians right out of their country, and followed them into the south of Albania. Gjinokastre (Argyrokastro) was captured and left behind; Korça (Koritza) was taken. The Greeks advanced inland from Korça to Voskopojë (Muskopolje) and along the Lake of Ohrida to Pogradets. Klissura was taken, and Tepelenë threatened. For a moment it looked as though the Italians were to be pushed into the sea. Italian reinforcements arrived, the High Command was changed several times, **and** counter-attacks were launched against the Greeks. These the Greeks held off, and later made some further small advances themselves. Thus, while Italy held down the greater part of Albania with her armies, the South was largely in the hands of Greece. The question of the future loomed **large for the Albanians. What** was in store for them?

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Albanian Independence

THE Axis Powers are going to be beaten in this war, and the question of Albania's future will therefore once more come up for decision. One's first reaction to the thought of Greek troops clearing the Italians out of Albania is to imagine the Greeks as deliverers, and to suppose that eventually King Zog will return triumphantly to Tirana to reconstruct his kingdom. Second thoughts, however, give one pause. Will not the Greeks have ambitions in regard to Albania? Will they not seek "frontier rectification"? Gjinokastre and Korea, which they held for some months, may well be claimed by them, as being of largely Greek population. Moreover, near Korea there are deposits of chromium. It might conceivably happen that Greece and Yugoslavia would seek to partition Albania between them, or that Greece might ask for a "Mandate" over the country. Greece will probably be in very high favour with Britain at the end of the war—and deservedly, for by her brave resistance to the Italians she has made a contribution of the first importance to our eventual victory; if she seeks reward in the manner which Balkan States are still prone to consider appropriate, namely, a slice of someone else's territory, it may not be altogether easy to refuse her. The Albanians want independence; if they are offered merely a change of masters, they may well consider that the Italians are no worse than the Greeks.

It is necessary to preserve a sense of proportion when considering such a country as Greece. A people which will fight for its independence against fearful odds is deserving of high praise for courage; and if it fights successfully, then it earns further praise for military ability. When that courage and that ability provide a turning-point in a story of hitherto unbroken disaster, and put new courage into the sorely pressed British, new confidence into prospective allies or

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wavering neutrals, it must be added that we British owe the Greeks a real debt of gratitude, and genuine respect. At the end of the war Greece will probably obtain, with our complete goodwill, the Dodecanese, and possibly even Cyprus. Nowhere else, however, can Greece be given any increase of territory except at the expense of non-Greek populations. It is coming to be realised by the more intelligent politicians everywhere that a gift of territory containing an alien population is no gift, but a "damnosa hereditas". There is evidence that the Greek politicians who were opposed to General Metaxas' dictatorship, and who were released at the beginning of the fight for independence, are gravely disquieted at the prospect that the Greek Government will try to secure increments of territory at the expense of Albania; yet it may well happen that the less enlightened Greeks will carry the day, and an unpleasant dispute will arise about Gjinokastrc and Korea. It is said that the released politicians are distressed at the death of Metaxas, since he was one single, not unreasonable man, and if convinced in any matter was sure to put his new convictions into effect; but subsequent Premiers will probably not have the moral authority of Metaxas; to convert them will not necessarily ensure the adoption of the desired policy.

There are not lacking signs that, while still victorious, the Greeks were staking out their claim to Southern Albania. Immediately before the outbreak of war in 1914, the Greek Bishop of Janina took in hand to prove to the world that the Southern territories of Albania were of Greek population. This was to be done by counting members of the Greek Church, irrespective of nationality, as Greeks, and by exterminating or driving out the Moslems. The Bishop gathered a strong force of irregulars, and marched over the territory, burning the Moslem villages, and killing or driving out the inhabitants. In 1940, when Gjinokastre fell into the hands of the Greeks, this same Bishop, in no wise altered in his ideas by 26 years of increasing age (but not of increasing wisdom), arrived at Gjinokastre and held a Te Deum in the Cathedral. This Te Deum was not, as might have been expected, offered in thanksgiving for the Greek victory over the Italians, but for "the reunion of the town with Greece".

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Similarly, at Korea, upon the expulsion of the Italians, the Greeks established a Town Council consisting of a Greek Mayor, and eleven Greek and four Albanian Councillors. It is claimed by the Greeks that 75 per cent, of the inhabitants of Korea are Greeks, though in fact well over 25 per cent, are Moslems, and therefore less than 75 per cent, belong to the Orthodox Church. Moreover, since the setting up of the Autocephalous National Church of Albania, it is not even technically true to speak of Orthodox Albanians as belonging to the "Greek" Church, let alone to regard them as being of Greek nationality.

While we are on the subject of Korea, it may be mentioned that Clare Hollingworth, who was the first British journalist to arrive in Korea on the heels of the Greek army, reported that the local people not only cheered the Union Jack, but also demonstrated in favour of Bishop Fan Noli. Now, Bishop Fan Noh is an elderly man, living in the United States, comfortably occupied with his literary work, and not in the least anxious to return to Albania. The King has long ago abandoned all enmity to him, and invited him to return to Albania, either to occupy some high position in Church or State, or to live there as a private citizen. The Bishop, being comfortably settled in America, preferred not to return. There is, however, no "Fan Noli Question" in Albanian pontics.

It seems to me probable that if the Albanians recover their independence in such circumstances as to give them a free choice of regime, they will elect King Zog as their ruler, with or without modifications in the Constitution. This, however, is only a personal estimate of probabilities, and should not be taken as the author's cast-iron opinion. Be this as it may, it is plainly impossible for the Albanians who are now in exile, whether supporters or opponents of the King, to commit in advance the million Albanians still in Albania, whose views cannot at the moment be ascertained. The exiles, therefore, came to King Zog in Paris, and offered to rally round him as a national leader for the purpose of attaining national liberation. They desired him to work with a national committee of exiles, and to lead the struggle for liberation, without prejudice to the question



View of Gjinokastre (Argyrokastro).

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of the regime in Albania when liberated. The King, for his part, expressed his willingness to step aside, should his person be the object of such enmities as might impair the national unity. However, France has collapsed and the King is in England as a refugee. As such, he has been obliged to give an undertaking to abstain from political activity.

Zog could not return to Albania and place himself at the head of the patriot forces, as the Emperor Haile Selassie has done in Ethiopia, without the positive co-operation of the British and Greek political authorities; it did not rest with him to decide when he should go to the front. British and Greek co-operation in its turn depends upon the recognition by these two countries of Albania as a country, the restoration of whose independence is among their war-aims, and their recognition of Zog as at least an Albanian national leader. This recognition assumed the greatest importance for the Albanians, as an indication of the attitude they may expect from the victors at the end of the war, and as a guide to their actions during the recent campaign in their country.

Briefly, their attitude is that the Italians are foreign oppressors, and must be driven out; but not if this means accepting some other foreign yoke—for example, the Greek—in place of the Italians. When the Italians attacked Greece, the Albanians in Istanbul published a manifesto against the Italians, and the Albanian Consul in Athens appealed for recruits among the Albanians living in Greece. (The Italians replied by publishing the most infamously defamatory statements about the Consul's personal character.) Indeed, many Albanians fought heroically alongside the Greek forces. There was, however, no general rising of the tribesmen behind the Italian lines, for the excellent reason that they did not know what would be the consequences of success. To substitute the Greek army for the Italian would be no improvement. If the British Government would announce Albania to be one of the countries whose liberation is a British war-aim, the Albanians would be reassured, and would know what to do. In that case, the worst they would have to fear would be the loss of a town or two, or a few square miles of

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territory, to Greece, and perhaps not even that. They would have risen and harried the Italians, they might have enabled the Greeks to drive the Italians into the sea ere the Germans came. As King Zog remarked, the Albanians ought to be good at guerilla warfare; they have done little else for centuries. The promise of independence however, is the essential thing.

From the Albanian point of view, the refusal of the British Government to make the necessary announcement is in the highest degree irritating. What are we waiting for? Are we not fighting for the rights of small nations? Do we not mean well by the Albanians? Do we not mean Albania to be independent—that is to say, at least as independent as other nations, within whatever federal structure may be devised for Eastern Europe? Do we mean to betray them to the Greeks—the Italians—the Yugoslavs? Do we not want and value their help? Do we not sympathise with them? The British Government replies that it has already undertaken too many entanglements and commitments; that it does not at present see any group of persons who can be regarded as representative of the Albanian people; in a word, that for the present it does not propose to take any action.

What is the reality of this situation? Surely, that the first aim of the British Government is to defeat the Germans. In order to do this, it is essential not to alienate our Greek allies. It will be extremely regrettable if, at the peace, the Greeks claim a pound of flesh which they really ought not to have; but better that than let them feel discouraged, and possibly have little heart for the struggle in which they engaged so bravely. After all, Greece at that time was a strong and well-organised Power, with an efficient, equipped army actually in the field, and having major successes to its credit. If the whole population of Albania (just over a million, including women and children) snatched up its available rifles and daggers, and went for the Italians tooth and nail, it could not compare in effect with the usefulness to the British and democratic cause of the vigorous achievements of the armed forces of the Kingdom of the Hellenes. Furthermore, in the course of defeating Germany,

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there may come a moment when Italy, heavily defeated in Africa, perhaps defeated elsewhere also, throws over its Fascist Government and sues for peace, or even offers to change sides. Are we to place obstacles in the way of any such development, by demanding the immediate evacuation of Albania? Again, Yugoslavia is also an ally, and may well consider herself entitled to be consulted in this matter. She may have views upon the Albanian question, which undeniably affects her very nearly.

These arguments are cynical; they do not treat the Albanian question upon its merits. But in the last war we signed away other people's territory to Italy, by the Treaties of London and St. Jean de Maurienne; and when the war ended, we found that the Treaties were in part impossible of fulfilment, in part an obstacle to peace; they conflicted with President Wilson's more righteous desire to give human beings the chance to decide, at least by local majorities, their own national allegiance. It is to be hoped that no similar engagements will be entered into in the present war; but the only way to avoid them may be to insist upon shelving, until the end of the war, all questions which may give rise to inter-allied controversy. One can, therefore, well understand the British Government's decision, however discouraging it must be to the Albanians, not to commit themselves in advance about the future of Albania.

What, however, of the Albanian question upon its own merits? Is it true, as the Albanians say, that they are a people perfectly capable of modernising themselves, perfectly capable of self-government, perfectly deserving of full independence? Or are the Italians and others right, who say that Albania can never stand alone, and must needs be under foreign tutelage? Ill-informed writers in the popular press of this country, at the time of the invasion of Albania, wrote long-winded and highly inaccurate articles to show that Albania was a mere nest of brigands, and that the termination of its independence need not be regretted. The articles were worthless as accounts of Albania, but they had a political object, namely, to prevent the generous British public from crying out in rage against the Government (that of Mr. Chamberlain) which had made a

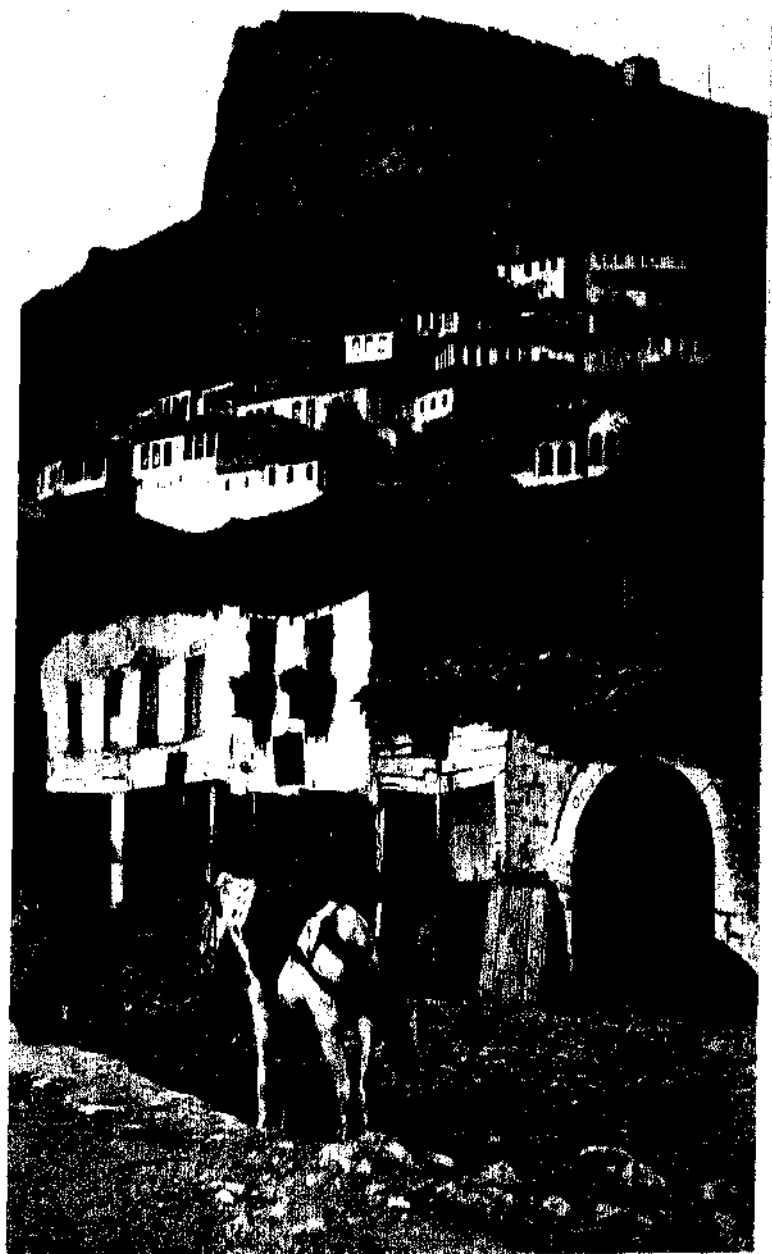
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"Gentleman's Agreement" with Mussolini, and from demanding strong British action against the aggressor. A section of the press was pacifist, not in the sense of the non-resisters, but in the spirit of isolationism; it found misrepresentation of Albania—as also of the Czechs—an effective technique for destroying public sympathy with the victims of aggression. It lied like Gocbbels, and like him it found a certain amount of credence.

Discounting the wilful misrepresentation of certain newspapers, and the disinterestedness of the Gallios, who think that Britain should care for none of these things, and of the crypto-Nazis, who desire all Europe to be divided into two or three anti-Bolshevik Lebensraume, what is really the truth about Albania? The foregoing chapters have assembled a quantity of material, but they have not, perhaps, answered this question. The case falls now to be argued with facts.

The Italian thesis is that the Albanians are a people whom it is impossible to civilise or to modernise; that they resist all attempts to raise their culture or their standard of living; that they wilfully neglect the mineral riches of their soil; that, in a word, the Albanians are hopeless, and the best that can happen is for their country to be taken over by some foreign Power, which will develop its resources, and drive the Albanians in the way they should go. As evidence of these allegations, they point out that, in some fifteen years of independence, the Albanians had not developed their chromium, their metals, their bitumen, their oil; that their agricultural methods were not modernised, their roads not asphalted, their poverty not relieved. Independent Albania, they said, was a failure. Only Italian-run Albania can hope to be a going concern, a centre of mineral development and proper cultivation; a hive of prosperity.

The Italian case rests upon a fundamental He. Albania needed capital for development; the League of Nations refused to supply it, and only from Italy could it be got; therefore, in face of the manifest perils of such a course (to which the King was by no means blind) Albania was obliged to accept loans from Italy. Italian help involved the foundation of a National Bank *under Italian control* (see



Berati: town and fortress.

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Chapter Six), and with extensive rights, granted to it in its Charter, over the development of all industries in Albania. Thus it was that nearly all of such development as was carried out in "independent" Albania was done by Italian companies, who were installed in their positions of privilege by the Bank of Albania, which was controlled by Italian interests. That is the positive side of the development—Italian firms exploiting Albanian resources. Now for the negative side. It sometimes happened that some foreign company obtained a claim, or established an industry, or made a discovery (as of chromium, near Korea) and seemed about to establish an industry, to the profit of Albania; immediately the Bank stepped in, and, by various sorts of Italian pressure, the foreigners were pushed out. For example, the Italians would not allow the chromium to be developed. Bitumen was worked in Albania by an Italian company; but it was exported to Italy, and not used upon the Albanian roads, which accordingly had a surface like a remote Devonshire lane. The Italians, again, mined the Albanian oil, but refused to build refineries in Albania, and shipped the oil in its crude state to Italy; they then sold refined oil to Albania at an exorbitant rate, thus preventing the Albanians from developing road transport on any adequate scale. In sum, the answer to the charge that independent Albania did not develop her resources is that *Italy would not let her*.

Furthermore, the Italians state that the Albanians took unkindly to education. This, too, is a lie. There was an admirable French Lycee at Korea, and other schools, elementary and secondary, throughout the country. The country people, and even old people, used to petition the Government for more books and facilities, so keen were they on education. The Government used to subsidise the studies of Albanian students at Western Universities. However, when these men came back, and took their places as officials in the Ministries, they had often to contend with the utmost opposition from the Italian "advisers". Upon the invasion, the French Lycee was immediately closed down by the Italians.

The feeling of British friends of Albania on this question has

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been well expressed by Lord Cecil, a message from whom was broadcast by the B.B.C. on Albanian Independence Day, 28th November 1940. It will be remembered that Lord Cecil was largely instrumental in securing the admission of Albania to the League of Nations, and consequently her general recognition as an independent State, some twenty years ago. The text of his message is as follows:—

"Of all the outrages on neighbouring nations committed in recent months by the totalitarian Governments, none has been worse than Mussolini's sudden and treacherous attack on Albania. For the time and in spite of the courageous defence of their liberty by the Albanians, the Italian hordes were successful. But be well assured that Nemesis awaits the Fascist tyrant. It would be fitting that our Greek friends, also fighting for freedom, should, with Albanian and British help, strike the first effective blow. Whether or not that alone will bring Mussolini to the ground, in any case friends of Liberty in Britain will insist on the restoration of Albanian independence and promote by all means in their power the prosperity of heroic Albania."

To sum up this question: let us beware of the Imperialist Fascist who says: "I will prevent this small country from developing itself; and then I will take it over, because it has shown that it *cannot develop itself*". This is the argument upon which rests, fundamentally, the case for a foreign "Mandate" over Albania. It is the case, *a fortiori*, for a definite foreign occupation and Protectorate. It is an unsound case, built upon a lie. The future of the Albanians can be placed with confidence in their own hands, provided that a genuine Albanian Government is restored to power, and is lent a relatively small sum of money (as national economies reckon magnitude) to maintain itself, and to start its industries and development along sound lines. If the Italians were obliged to let Albania off the repayment of all the outstanding loans, to transfer the shares and capital of the Bank of Albania to the Albanian Government, to pay compensation for the invasion of the country, and to

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present to Albania free of charge all the improvements which they have installed in the country, before and during their occupation; and if Albania were then able to start with a clean slate, and to raise a loan in Great Britain or other Western countries, there is every reason to hope that she would soon make rapid strides. Albania has excellent resources of minerals, timber, pasture, fishing, tourism; there are plenty of opportunities for profitable investment, which would have been developed before had not the Italians of intent retarded the prosperity of their destined prey.

With regard to possible loans from Britain and other Western Powers, it may well be asked, "Why should we do all the paying?" There are two answers: first, we should make a handsome profit; second, "Am I my brother's keeper?"—do we or do we not wish to extend the number of persons, and the area of territory, devoted to civilisation and the search for a good life? Dare we, morally or politically, refuse to help Albania, and leave her to fall once again a victim to the Fascist wolves?



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