

The King of Bulgaria.

His Resolve to Govern as Well as Rule.

KING FERDINAND OF BULGARIA celebrated the completion of the twenty-fifth year of his reign last month, and at the present time is involved with his subjects in the Balkan crisis.

King Ferdinand's achievements during the last quarter of a century are described as remarkable. A writer in "P.M.G." points out that it is still the fashion in some diplomatic circles to regard him as an unstable mediocrity. King Ferdinand's best answer is to point to what he has done for Bulgaria—and for himself.

This stout, neurasthenic man, who cannot mount a horse without visible tremors, has succeeded, and succeeded brilliantly, where handsome, gallant Prince Alexander of Battenberg came miserably to grief and to death. He has triumphed against almost overwhelming odds, and the zenith of his career in the Balkan Peninsula has still to be attained.

One wonders what are the thoughts of King Ferdinand as he looks back to the memorable night in 1887 when the three Bulgarian delegates found him seated at a marble-topped table in a little variety theatre at Vienna.

He was of Royal blood, but was still an obscure officer, only twenty-six years old, in the service of the Emperor of Austria. Yet he had been studiously trained for kingship. He was the grandson of Louis Philippe, and the son of Princess Clementine, accounted in her day the cleverest woman in Europe. Her dearest wish was to see her favourite son wearing a crown.

The Bulgarians in the little theatre offered him the throne for which his mother yearned.

The formal offer, sent by the Bulgarian Sobranje, came later, and in more ceremonious terms. Ferdinand declined to accept it without the consent of the Powers, which was not forthcoming. But when Stambuloff, the powerful and autocratic Bulgarian statesman, sent him a message to say that he could only win the Bulgarian throne by seating himself upon it in defiance of Russia and the other Powers, he took his courage in both hands and started down the Danube.

He began his reign twenty-five years ago at Tirnova, the ancient capital of Bulgaria, and unquestionably the most picturesque inland city in Europe.

The Bulgarians acclaimed him, but his situation was for a time almost desperate. Russia called him a usurper; Turkey said his presence in Bulgaria was illegal; the Bishops of the Holy Synod refused to do him homage; the other Powers turned their backs upon him.

His Bismarck.

He survived and overcame every rebuff. For years Stambuloff was his Bismarck, crushing all opposition, building up a solid administration, fighting Russian intrigues, creating a new and prosperous Bulgaria.

But Ferdinand, though wisely deciding to leave control during his novitiate in the hands of his masterful Prime Minister, had no intention of remaining for ever under the domination of a mayor of the palace.

The birth of an heir, Prince Boris, gave him his opportunity. Stambuloff fell, and Ferdinand said openly: "Henceforth I mean to govern as well as rule."

He fulfilled his determination, and thereby gives the lie to the suggestion that he is weak and vacillating. Stambuloff's murder in 1895 prejudiced his position for years, because Bulgarians thought he might have saved the ex-Minister had he permitted him to evade his enemies by leaving the country.

To-day he is more popular in Bulgaria than he has ever been. No longer on his return from one of his foreign tours need he alight at a wayside station and journey across country to his palace at the dead of night.

The reason is plain. When, on October 5, 1908, Ferdinand entered the Church of the Forty Martyrs at Tirnova, threw off the yoke of Turkey for ever, proclaimed Bulgaria an independent kingdom, and declared himself King, he was conscious

of making a policy entirely of his own devising.

Even his Ministers never knew his intentions until the last moment. The bold game served his purpose, and he soon received general recognition; but what was of greater value to him was that he had gratified the strongest ambition of his people.

Under him Bulgaria has become the most powerful State in the Balkans, with the finest army. Her destiny is only partially fulfilled.

The emancipated Bulgarians have a greater future before them. Their King may be an adroit manipulator of policy, subtle rather than strong, with a foot in both great camps of Europe, but he has deserved well of his subjects, and, on the whole, has been a friend of peace.

Big Difficulties.

Another reviewer states that the task which in July, 1887, lay before the young

Prince was to counteract Bulgarian influence in Macedonia, and in 1908 the outbreak of the Young Turk revolution brought affairs once more to a crisis.

It was widely felt in Bulgaria that the trouble in Turkey afforded a golden opportunity for the achievement of national unity, while the Prince, who noted the sympathy which the Young Turk movement had aroused in Europe, resolved on maintaining a policy of caution. But a slight put upon his representative at Constantinople by the new Turkish Government, and the action of the Powers, who insisted that the Bulgarian portion of the Oriental Railway Company's line which had been seized by his Government should be restored to Turkey, produced a state of feeling in Bulgaria which could not be ignored, and on October 5, 1908, the Prince proclaimed at Tirnova, the independence of Bulgaria, and assumed the title of Czar of the Bulgarians.

The progress of the youngest State in Europe has been extraordinary. The condition of the people has greatly improved; education has made wonderful strides, and the commercial and industrial development of the country has been equally rapid. Bulgarian credit now stands so high that the conversion of a large portion of the public debt can be carried out on advantageous terms. The country has been covered with a network of railways, and new



WHY NOT THIS WAY OF SETTLING INTERNATIONAL DISPUTES?

Sovereign was no easy one. It was exactly a year since his predecessor, the gallant Prince Alexander, had been seized in his Palace by the troops whom he had led to victory, compelled to sign his abdication, and transported to Russian soil at Rent. Throughout his reign of seven years Prince Alexander had been confronted with the problem of reconciling the determination of the Bulgarians to assert their independence with the claim of Russia to keep the newly-liberated nation in leading-strings. He finally determined to assert a national policy, and the part which he played in the Eastern Rumanian revolution sealed his fate. The nation, as a whole, was with him, as was shown by the counter-revolution which brought him back to Sofia, but Russian influence was still strong in the country, and after his departure the task of opposing it fell to the dauntless Stambuloff. Russia had already denounced the union with Eastern Rumania and had urged Turkey to reconquer the revolted provinces; she now forbade the convocation of the Grand Sobranje for the election of a new Prince and withdrew her representatives from Bulgaria. A number of military revolts organized by her adherents were crushed by Stambuloff with ruthless severity, and the country was still in a distracted condition when Prince Ferdinand ascended the vacant Throne. There is reason to believe that from the outset he realised the necessity of a reconciliation with Russia, but time and patience were needed for this purpose, and at first he had little choice but to harmonise his policy with that of the strong-willed dictator to whom in fact he owed his Crown. He was denounced by Russia as a usurper and disowned by Austria; the other Powers stood aloof in defer-

Reconciliation With Russia.

With the fall of Stambuloff the moment arrived for a reconciliation with Russia. The reconciliation was practically effected by the conversion of the Heir-Apparent, Prince Boris, to the Orthodox faith (February 15, 1908). This event was speedily followed by the recognition of the Prince by the Sultan and the Powers.

With the legalisation of the Prince's position the long period of tension came to an end, and Bulgaria ceased to be regarded as the storm-centre of Europe. The time of probation was over; Prince Ferdinand's statesmanlike qualities now met with general recognition, and his presence in Bulgaria came to be regarded as a guarantee of peace. The influence of Russia now became predominant in the country, but Russia, taught by experience, wisely refrained from interfering in its internal affairs. One serious cause of anxiety, however, remained—and remains to the present day. The reconciliation with Russia rendered the Macedonian question more acute owing to the belief prevailing among the Bulgarians on either side of the Turkish frontier that Russia would now insist on the fulfilment of the Treaty of San Stefano and the union of their race. The Macedonian agitation increased after the visit of the Grand Duke Nicholas, General Ignatieff, and a number of Russian officers to Bulgaria in 1902. The movement, though discouraged by official Russia, gained ground, and in the following year a revolt broke out in Macedonia. The insurrection was suppressed with great barbarity, and the consequent excitement in Bulgaria put the Prince's statesmanship to a severe test. The agitation was maintained in subsequent years owing to the efforts of

the Greeks to counteract Bulgarian influence in Macedonia, and in 1908 the outbreak of the Young Turk revolution brought affairs once more to a crisis.

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ports have been constructed at a heavy outlay. The army has been brought to a high stage of efficiency. The dynasty has survived a long period of storm and stress; it is now firmly established, and its position has been further assured by the King's marriage with Princess Eleonore of Reuss-Kostritz, the present Queen, whose beneficent activity in many directions has endeared her to the Bulgarian people.

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