

# An Affair of Servian Outposts.

By HAROLD BLIND.

THE great mountains, white with the first snows of an early winter, soared into the deep, blue sky, where a few clouds drifted and caught upon the higher peaks, strung out like smoke. The mighty spaciousness of the country, with its great valleys and forests and rivers and tumbled hills, and mountains that seemed to rush upwards to the sun, dwarfed all things human into utter insignificance.

A pair of eagles, disturbed from their eyrie on the crags above the pass, swung in ever-higher circles, and their bleak calls fell earthwards to where the road lies. The pass swarmed with men whose ranks ran down to the plains of ancient Moen movements looked as aimless as those of ants in a disturbed nest. For miles to the northwards the road was blocked with the advanced guard of a waiting army. Southwards a brigade of Turkish infantry was marching to the support of the battalion which held the pass. The haze of rifle smoke hung over the skirmish, and the firing sounded sily in the great stillness of the autumn noontide. The Servian Brigadier, who was acting entirely without orders from his capital, kicked his charger's flanks impatiently. His plan had been to surprise the pass, win a battle, and gain glory . . . whilst precipitating a war from which many pickings must be obtainable by fair means or foul. So, instead of merely watching the frontier, he had crossed it . . . and found his advance checked by a handful of Redifs . . . and he did not know what force was behind them. He sent all his brigade against the stubborn trenches, and time and again they were thrust back by the bayonet. The fighting was of an indescribable ferocity . . . genuine hatred animating the soldiery, who sweated, dodged and fired and charged; or stood solidly, abazie with fanaticism, behind the sangars.

But it was down in the village where the horror of war was feared and felt . . . where the people crouched waiting for what night would bring—Turkish troops or Servian saviours. All day long they heard the firing drifting down from the mountain road. All day long they waited, ready to hide in holes and cellars at the approach of Turkish parties. In the late afternoon they heard the sound of guns. The Servians had brought a battery into action, and that meant that the Turks were lost. They retired from the pass—a battered remnant of raging "siehids" . . . and, alas for the village! the Servians did not pursue them. The magnificent Brigadier, with his plumes and buffion, was content with his victory, and merely held the pass. When darkness fell and the stars burned in myriads above the peaks his officers watched the village on the plain burning . . . horribly brilliant in that clear air . . . dancing flames and rolling, ruddy smoke.

Captain Mahmud Ghashko was down there in the heat and smoke and flying sparks. His company was entirely out of hand and would have killed any officer who had tried to stop them carrying out the systematic erasure of the Christian village from the map. Captain Ghashko had been quartered here for many weeks, and he had been just and humane, and held his men to strict account for breaches of discipline. He had been to Berlin and London.

He went from house to house amidst the horrors of the sack . . . he was searching for a woman he loved. During his stay in the little town he had made friends with an old man and fallen in love with his daughter, and she, poor girl, had given him back his passion. In spite of all her hatred of the traditional tyrants of her land. They had lived a perfect little idyll until the crash of war actually came; and it had seemed so remote from this sunny pastoral community, where even the Sultan's firman ran slowly and the tax-gatherer was not too harsh for fear of his own throat.

Mahmud Ghashko intended to take this girl away to his home in Chalcedice, where the gardens and white houses of Ormeia overlooked the blue gulf of Kæsandra. He would take the old father, too. He would let Niseia keep her faith—for they both worshipped the one God. At the head of the beaten regiment he had entered the main street, and Colonel Sulaiman Ibrahim Bey had given orders to fortify the place and hold it until the hourly expected reinforcements arrived. The Moslems thought that the best way to ensure their safety was to put an end to the disaffected Christian population. They proceeded to do this with a sincerity of purpose worthy of a better cause. A house was fired—quite by accident, he it said—and then a sergeant remembered that some Bulgars had thrown Turkish soldiers soaked in oil into a burning house. A dozen willing hands brought paraffin and Christians, and a fanatic said that it could not be evil to give these dogs a foretaste of Hell—and then, the fat was in the fire! The inhabitants turned like rats at bay, and the place was an inferno. The officers cursed and commanded in vain, and then shrugged their shoulders and rolled cigarettes, whilst the company drummers rolled their drums and maddened the men as the Janissaries used to madden to the kettledrums and the bells on the horse-tail standards. But Mahmud Ghashko went through the riot searching for Niseia. He ran from place to place where the shrieks of women guided him. He smote aside the soldiers with the flat of his sword, and looked, and hurried on. Her father's house was a furnace, and he seized a drunken corporal of his own company and shook him and beat him until he understood, and gasped:

"The old jackal fled, effendi! Indeed he did—like a hare, with the young man at his heels!"

"Young man, what?" shouted Mahmud. "Young woman, you mean!"

"Oh, no! Old jackal and young cub fled with a dozen of the faithful after them."

"Which way, dog?"

"Thither. Towards the church."

Mahmud let go the man. He ran fast to the church that loomed in the light of the flames. Here the last remnant of the people, led by the priest, held out against the horde which thundered on the great doors and fired in answer to the flashes from the windows and the bellfry. The bell was tolling, and the sound of sacred song rose above the infernal noises of the pillage and the roar of the burning. Mahmud found a warrant officer coolly directing that petroleum-soaked straw be placed before the doors and set alight. He was horribly quiet, and his eyes were alight with hate.

This man had lost three brothers amongst the hills, and his sister had been burned by bandits. He was getting his own back, and said so when Mahmud ordered him to spare the refugees in the church. Mahmud waited—he would be first inside, any way. In spite of liberal drenching in oil, the doors burned slowly. The Turks lost a few men, and grew steadier and more savage. Then some one threw a stick of dynamite. . . . The doors burst, and Mahmud was knocked backwards in a shower of flaming brands and debris. When he staggered up, the church was already rushed and desecrated. He fought his way along the surging, screaming aisle, to the altar, where the old priest still stood, tall and majestic, holding aloft the symbol of his creed. Something—some awe or fear—held back the blood-drunk Moslems for a moment. Ghashko drove men right and left. He saw Niseia—saw her eyes, and heard her cry of "Mahmud! Mahmud!" and the name of Him whom even the Moslems count a great prophet. He cut down a man who turned on him like a wild beast robbed of his prey. He saw her old father slashed and dying. He saw the grim warrant officer, who had shot the priest, standing beside him.

"Help me save this girl!" said Mah-

mod, "or by Allah and His Prophet, I will have you shot for mutiny!"

"I will save her! The Koran bids us be merciful!" said this strange fanatic. "Come!"

He took Niseia by the wrist, and led her out into the open, and everywhere the mad soldiers fled away from him respectfully and reverently. He was already one of those religious leaders who appear when the jehad is proclaimed—men whom the Turk and his kindred will follow and obey—men who spring from the earth, from the ranks of the army, or the precincts of the Palace and the mosques at Stamboul—men mysterious and silent until the need arises, and then . . . fanners of the flames!

The dawn was breaking, and the smoking ruins of the village and contorted corpses were hideous in the growing light. As Mahmud and Niseia looked about them for some safe refuge a shouting and a rattle of rifles broke the monotone of moans and settling ashes and the whisper of flames revived by the morning wind. Turkish soldiers were running towards them—to the hill where stood the church which now flung a huge banner of black smoke across the sunrise. Behind them, riding down the Jagards, swept the Servian lussars, smiting with their glittering swords. They had come up unobserved in the dark and surprised their enemies completely. As they charged they yelled as only Slavs can yell. The sights and sounds of the massacre drove them into a frenzy, and they rushed their foam-flecked horses up at the rallying major which Mahmud and the sergeant-major had formed in the graveyard. There was no question of quarter in that blind melee. Down went man and horse—down went Turk and Christian . . . up again to fall once more. . . . The old, old fight was fought again as it had been fought in the Crusades, on Mohacs field, and before the walls of Vienna—as it had been fought when Sobieski's Polish Lancers beat back the invincible Janissaries and when the Russians shook the night of the Crescent to its foundations.

Mahmud stood alone with Niseia, and the grim Hussars closed round. A staff officer with the famous eagle plume of the Royal Guards struck up a trooper's sabre at the girl's shriek . . . and she clung to his spurred boot as his horse backed. The troopers seized Mahmud and waited to kill. The officer nodded to the girl once and thrice. Then he said—

"Take that captain to the general! Fall out, four of you! . . . Now then, march him off! He has saved this Christian woman's life and honour! . . . Here! Catch that horse and mount her on it . . . Take her, too! . . . Quick!"

He looked to the south where the road ran from the village towards far Constantinople. On that long incline he saw a dark mass moving swiftly . . . it was Turkish cavalry at a gallop. The Hussars formed up and the patient horses found their ranks again. The early sun flashed on steel and brass—it flashed on the trumpets as the trumpeters lifted them to their lips. The Turks opened out from the road into squadrons in line and came straight on and up. Then the trumpets sounded and flashed again and the Hussars charged to meet the darker horsemen, whilst Mahmud and Niseia and four sulky troopers rode swiftly out of the battle to the pass.

Captain Mahmud Ghashko and Niseia stood before the brilliant Servian Brigadier and his staff, who had been watching the cavalry skirmish—the shock of the squadrons—the mass plunging away to the right, reeling, slaying, inextricably mixed. The general lowered his glasses and turned to the Turkish prisoner held by two Hussars. He looked curiously at Niseia, spoke to the Brigade-major, and then said—

"It is a pity your men sacked the village! . . . I will take your parole, captain! You are out of action for this campaign!" He waved a gloved hand, and the troopers marched Mahmud off, and Niseia followed faithfully behind them.

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## A STEEL WORKER'S NERVES.

THEY WERE BROKEN DOWN BY INDIGESTION.

### MOTHER SEIGEL'S SYRUP RESTORED THEM.

Who would suppose that a steel worker's nerves would ever be "unstrung" and out of order? Think of it! A steel worker's nerves! The very word "steel" makes you think of superb strength, unflinching, steady nerve. Yet the brief story which follows tells you what indigestion can do, even for a man of iron. Then you will not wonder that indigestion breaks down less strenuous occupations of life.

Writing under date of May 1, 1912, Mr R. Reynolds, of 110 Bunce Street, North Melbourne, Victoria, says: "I am a steel worker, and whilst following my occupation, some three years back, my health completely broke down through indigestion, and I was soon reduced to a condition of extreme weakness and prostration. My liver was sluggish, painful, and disorganised, and I had great trouble with my nerves, which were unstrung and out of order. I could not sleep, had headaches, felt ill and run down all the time, and was so afflicted with biliousness that I could not retain food on my stomach. In consequence of this I gradually became so weak and exhausted that I had to knock off work and lay up for a while."

### THE BUILDING-UP PROCESS.

There you have the plain, straightforward story of a man of vigorous system and mode of life, who had been conquered by mankind's commonest enemy. His stomach went wrong—it does not matter from what cause—but it developed weakness, and his food failed to give him proper nourishment. His liver became stagnant, or, as he says, sluggish, and the bile fluid found its way into his blood and biliousness came on. The blood, being thus poisoned, affected his nerves and made them weak, feverish and uncertain; he could not sleep because his nerves lacked repose and his weak stomach rejected the food that should have kept him strong. Next he says: "I tried many things, but nothing did me any real good until on a friend's advice, I began using Mother Seigel's Syrup. Relief came after about half-a-dozen doses of the Syrup and, after using it steadily for a short time, I was able to go back to my employment again, feeling as good as new and fully restored to health and strength."

Mother Seigel's Syrup cured Mr Reynolds by strengthening and toning up his stomach and liver. Then his digestion became natural, his food nourished him, his blood was freed from poisonous bile products and his nerves again became like the steel he works in. The Syrup cures because it is made of medicinal extracts of certain roots, barks, and leaves, which have a special tonic and curative effect on the digestive organs. Try it for yourself.

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