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SOPHIA IVANOVICS *The* SERVIAN JOAN OF ARC

TOLD FROM THE FACTS

By HENRY W. FISCHER.

THE Servian Joan of Arc—at last an inkling of romance in the monotonously bloody Balkan war. Letters from Belgrade call her Sophia Ivanovics, a rather common name in Servia, but full of significance, to the present writer, at least.

More than nine years ago, on the morning of June 2, 1903, when I was racing from the steamboat landing in Belgrade toward the royal palace, which, six hours before, had been turned into a shambles by murderous army officers who killed the sorry King Alexander and his all too spritely queen, Draga—when I was standing up in the carriage, urging the "droshky" to exceed the speed limit, my right arm caught at a sign hanging half way across the narrow, crooked street.

"Ivanovics," read the advertisement, and there was a painted hand pointing toward a butcher shop.

A few minutes later the cab was stopped by the mounted guard drawn around the Konak (the castle), but the cordon of troops opened quickly at the sight of my correspondent's card, and the officer who took charge of me grinned broadly as he drew my attention to an object, covered with a black cloth, resting against the foot of the palace wall.

"A neat job," he said, "Ivanovics couldn't have done better."

The awful significance of the phrase became clear to me when I was asked to attend the autopsy of the late Queen in the throne room of the new palace, now King Peter's residence. Alas, those murderous brutes had used poor Draga—it was her covered body that I saw on the ground—exactly as a butcher dresses the carcass of a lamb, ready for sale. Ivanovics was the chief butcher of the town. Hence the ghastly joke, which everybody seemed to esteem the height of hilarity.

WHEN I sought once more to break through the belt of troopers to do some telegraphing, the waiting cabby asked me to intercede with the officers on behalf of a little girl standing at his elbow.

"It's Sophia Ivanovics," he said, in his atrocious French, "the butcher's daughter. She's captain of the boy Komitatschis She's crazy to see the palace and tell her soldiers."

"Nonsense," I replied, jumping into the droshky, "that blood-spattered Konak is no sight for a child. Be off to the station. Pashall!"

While Cabby climbed into his box, I felt a tugging at my sleeve—Sophia Ivanovics. She was talking earnestly. Of course, I didn't understand a word of what she said, but her dark, loquacious eyes held a speech that was hard to resist. I shook myself free and threw her a small silver coin. The 15-year-old girl picked it up, spat on it and flung it back at me.

"The Komitatschis—what are they?" I asked a Servian army officer.

"Turk-killing volunteers—boy patriots." He explained further: "As your American youngsters dream of going out to kill Indians, so our boys think killing Turks the grandest of sports. They gather in bands, elect a captain, steal, borrow or buy some sort of primitive arms and train for the war that is to come."

"A little girl was pointed out to me as the head of one of these Turk-killing bands," I remarked.

"You mean Sophia, the butcher's daughter. Sure, she's one of our fiercest patriots. Every time she sees her father behead a sheep or mutton, she vows to the Virgin to cut off the head of a Turk—when she is big enough for that sort of pastime."

The officer laughed cruelly and added: "As Ivanovics supplies half the town with meat, she will have quite a job on her hands some day."

SOPHIA has made good, terribly good. In the years that intervened between the death of the last Obronovitch and the rehabilitation of his successor, King Peter, she trained a band of Turk-killers that astonished even the regulars by its perfect discipline, while outdoing Servian, Bulgar and Montenegrin in deeds of valor and stratagem. The newspapers call her Servia's Joan of Arc and, to a certain extent, she deserves the title, for she created her army out of nothing. She is a powerful ally to her King and did as much damage to her country's enemy as the Maid of Orleans did to the English. Nor is the religious element lacking, for Sophia is an ardent Greek Catholic, remembering which, the Metropolitan of Belgrade blessed her standard and her own and troopers' arms before they started out to fight for "God and country."

Sophia and her band of 500 crossed the frontier into Turkey even the night before King Nikita made his spectacular descent upon the hereditary enemy. She knew that war was decided upon and, like the Japs at Port Arthur, didn't bother about serving special notice. She and hers were Turk-killers pure and simple—diplomacy, respect for the Great Powers and their decrees, were out of her line.

AN army such as Sophia's the world never saw before. In the Balkan countries every able-bodied male between the ages of 17 and 60 is a soldier as a matter of course. Sophia, then, had to recruit the lame and the halt, cripples and hunchbacks; one-armed men; one-legged men; men with deficient eyesight. She accepted boys of 15, men of 70. Yet there weren't enough, for Servia is only a small country.

One day when studying modern warfare in a stray volume belonging to the Belgrade Public Library, she came across a proposition by an Englishman concerning an Amazon corps—the very idea wanted for doubling her contingent, and forthwith Sophia began to enlist members of her own sex under her banner. As in her country most of the work of the butcher shops is done by women and girls, Sophia first addressed herself to her co-workers. The gospel of Turk-killing was like sweet music to them.

By and by 200 girls joined the Ivanovics Komitatschis, making the corps 800 strong, including reserves and second reserves. When Sophia put 500 men and girls into the field, enough would be left at home to fill up the gaps caused by fighting, by sickness and accident.

BUT these columns of undesirable males and lusty females had to be trained, had to be armed, had to be made a "holy body" to become really effective.

Arming was the least trouble, for the government helped some and occasional raids into Turkish territory helped some more. For the rest, Sophia commanded each of her soldiers to bring a rifle and a bayonet within a certain stated period on pain of losing his or her job. They did. No questions asked.

As to training: In Servia the very children know how to aim a gun, considering that, as a rule, a Turk must be shot before he allows his head to be cut off. And to cut off Turkish heads is a religion with the Balkaners.

But how to keep order in this wild horde, with the majority of men frights and most of the women young and pretty? The Joan of Arc legend answered the question.

Sophia and the members of her sex in the little army must consecrate themselves to the "cause"; they must swear on the Sacrament that they will not listen to any man's song of love as long as the Turk isn't driven back to Constantinople and beyond. No love-making, no marriage, no family for them until the great object is attained.

When her women soldiers had bowed to the inevitable, making oath before an altar or shrine, Sophia tackled the male, her own betrothed among the many.

"Henceforth we know each other as brothers and sisters only," she commanded. "Kiss me now for the last time and wait for your reward till the war is over."

IT was a sexless army that crossed the Turkish frontier at Vranya, making straight for Uskub, the ancient capital of Servia in the Middle Ages. Yet outward marks of sex were plenty, for it is no easy matter to disguise a Servian woman, even if she does wear men's garb and affects men's style—nature has been too kind to her, not in good looks, perhaps, but otherwise.

"If they had been Venuses, one and all, and my men soldiers Adonises, I would have shot off the head of any that dared make eyes at the other," said Sophia to King Peter two weeks later, when they met for the first time.

"I think you are capable of it, Sophia," replied His Majesty. The King asked her to give an account of the band's doings.

"The worst soldier I've got cut off three Turks' heads, and that fellow walks on a crutch," reported Sophia without waste of words.

"And your share?" queried Peter.

"I counted till twenty, then I stopped; there were so many other things to do."

The King of Servia has two sons in the field, George, 25 years old, and Crown Prince Alexander, one year his junior. In times of peace George was fond of affecting the fire-eater; he was fairly boiling over with desire to shed his blood for the "dear fatherland." Alexander was less boisterous, but he, too, dreamt of conquest, of making a name for himself as a warrior.

Of course, these boys, when they really did go to war, had all the advantages high birth and the rank of general holds out. Yet Peter was forced to admit that neither of them had done even an infinitesimal part of the work accomplished by Sophia.

"I MAKE you a captain with my regulars," said the King to Sophia. "You will place your command under ———" (naming a high officer).

"With your Majesty's permission, I will have no overlord," replied the butcher's girl, "not even you; but if you think it advantageous, my band shall march at the head of the regulars—always."

According to last advices from the seat of war, Sophia and her mixed regiment have taken part in five big battles after successfully engaging in most difficult reconnoitering work.

"Their hatred of the Turk carries these crippled men and young women on to deeds of almost unbelievable bravery," writes an officer on King Peter's staff. "Where regulars would fear to tread, they crawl or walk in as unconcernedly as if they were bound for a dance hall.

"At the second battle around Uskub, I saw Sophia's horse drop. She had been doing adjutant's duty to the commander, riding from one end of the battlefield to the other, sometimes penetrating the enemy's lines at the risk of her own life, besides marshalling her own troops. I thought her lost and was creeping up to the place where she went down, when she suddenly got up.

"'I wasn't hurt,' she cried. 'I am going to get me another horse.' And she made her way toward the Turkish battle line, creeping ahead cautiously and making use of every advantage the ground offered. In half an hour she was back mounted on a great white Arab horse. From one of the stirrups dangled a bloody Turk's head. She had shot him, decapitated him and had taken his horse before the astonished enemy discovered what she was about.

"Our soldiers cheered her as she rode down the lines to report to the commander some of the observations made."

SOPHIA is a poet as well as a successful guerrilla war leader. Here follows the battle hymn she wrote and set to rough music for her troop:

SOPHIA'S BATTLE HYMN.

Kill 'em!
Our day has come, the war is on,
Kill 'em!
On to the road of liberty,
Forward!
Five hundred years we suffered
As no people ever suffered;
Think of our sufferings and kill 'em!
Kill without mercy. Keep the banner of liberty afloat.
Once our little mother had a dreadful enemy,
But she carried revenge in her womb—
Think of her and bury mercy!
Strike, strangle, stab and shoot.
Think of the wailings of our little mother!
Think of her!
Die or strike, kill or bite the dust;
Kill 'em!
Our day is here!
Onward to liberty!

THIS remarkable war song is Sophia's confession of faith, embodying to a nicety her ideas of a soldier's duty. We know that questions of sex do not exist for her while the struggle is on. On that point she feels so intensely she assumes all other women necessarily share her convictions.

To a poor mother in Prizren, who was bewailing the loss of her only son, she said: "Be proud! Thou art the mother of a hero," and she kissed her hands as a token of admiration.

On the march to Scutari a courier from Sofia brought news of the execution of a woman, shot as a spy.

Sophia asked for particulars. The woman, it seems, was the wife of an officer on the Bulgarian general staff. She had a lover, an attache of the Turkish embassy. This man was charged by his government with procuring Bulgaria's war plans and was threatened with immediate recall unless successful.

The woman, who was much younger than her husband, couldn't bear the thought of losing the man she loved. She stole the plans from her husband's desk. The Turk had them photographed, but was arrested with his prize still on Bulgarian territory.

The treason had no evil results for Bulgaria. Nevertheless the Turk was shot and, after a fair trial, his inamorata was condemned to the same fate.

King Ferdinand hesitated long before he affixed his signature to the death warrant for the woman, but being persuaded that it was the best thing for the sake of the example, he finally signed away her life.

"I wish I had been there to shoot her," said Sophia, after listening to the story, and she added scornfully: "And what became of the husband of that wicked Bulgarian woman?"

She was told that he had sought and found death at the battle of Kirk-Kilisse, being one of the first to die at that engagement.

"Death in battle was too good for a noodle like him," was Sophia's comment.

BEFORE starting for the seat of war Sophia made her little army promise not to attempt to write home or to accept letters from home, if accident should favor them, as long as the war lasted. "We must cut out sentiment," she said; "no mother's pleading on the one side, no giving away of war news, voluntary or involuntary, on the other."

She lost one-half of her troop since she started out to kill Turks, drawing substitutes from the reserves at home, but in no case were the relatives and friends of the dead and wounded informed. "We must guard against making cowards of patriots," is Sophia's motto.

In the long run the operations of the Servian army proved too limited for Sophia's ardor. She and her band had gone out to kill Turks. Long marches to the sea and sieges were not to their liking. So, about a month ago, the Komatatschis separated from King Peter's regulars and marched across Macedonia and Thrace upon Constantinople. They found the Bulgarians actively engaged in battering down the Chatalja line of fortifications and offered their services as scouts and spies. General Saboff, Czar Ferdinand's commander-in-chief, who knew Sophia by reputation, granted the request and laughingly added: "I suppose if I offered you a decoration for every Turk's head you bring in, the cost for medals would bankrupt the Sofia treasury."

The Belgrade butcher girl only smiled in reply, but that broadening of her lips meant untold misery to the enemies of her race.

Let's draw a veil over her marauding expeditions, the awful surprises she sprung on unsuspecting outposts. In every subsequent battle before Constantinople she proved of aid to the commander-in-chief by advance information obtained and by messages carried to points where no man dared penetrate, for Sophia is as quick to impersonate the other sex as to represent her own. As a rule she wears trousers stuck in riding boots, but around her waist she has a voluminous skirt rolled up, ready to be let down at a moment's notice.

She straddles her horse, of course, but when occasion calls for it, she can play the mute Moslem woman, seated decorously on mule or camel back, her face hidden by the regulation veil.

And this ability to masquerade gained Sophia one of the most extraordinary sights, maybe one of the most dreadful, of the great war.

AT the battle of Lule Burgas she became separated from her troops and finally found herself engulfed in the Turkish retreat. To save her life—for the Turks know Sophia to their terror—she threw away her hat, donned her veil and let down her skirt. When her horse was shot under her, she captured a donkey, detached from a fleeing caravan and rode toward the Chatalja lines, as fast as her poor mount would carry her. On the eve of the second day she met some Turks from Adu-Sheira, sent to gather information of the state of the war by Princess Zekie, the wife of a high Turkish commander, who lives in a splendid palace near the town named.

"She rode a white horse."

When the Turks learned that their supposed compatriot knew all about the battle of Lule Burgas, they invited her to go with them to Abu and report to their mistress.

Sophia accepted. At the palace her animal was taken care of; she had a good meal and bath, then slipped into the new garments her hostess sent her.

Presently she was taken into the room where Princess Zekie sat, dressed in somber robes, amid surroundings of a funereal aspect.

Her Highness asked Sophia a thousand questions about the state of the Turkish army and the defeat of Lule Burgas. When she learned that the retreat terminated in a rout, that her country's soldiers were badly led, illy provisioned and almost without ammunition, the Princess was beside herself with grief.

She tore her gown, grabbed a handful of ashes from the fireplace and strewed them on her head.

"I, a Moslem princess, feel disgraced by the disasters that overcame the Turkish army," she wailed. "Our people's ancient heroism has vanished—only cravens and thieves are left.

"Woe to me, that my husband is among the dishonored, that he had to give up his sword to a Christian dog. I won't outlive such shame."

The Princess' women took care of her, and Sophia was conducted to the harem, situated opposite the palace. As she passed through the courtyard, she noticed a heap of fire wood around a post in the center of the square. The wood was artistically decorated and garnished with flowers and pots of incense.

AFTER the bloody work of the battle and the subsequent long ride over groundless roads, Sophia slept like one dead, but was aroused shortly after midnight by the wailing of many voices and the crackling of fire.

She ran to the barred window to meet a ghastly sight. The piles of wood she had seen in the yard was now a funeral pyre. Princess Zekie had her arms around the stake, her dress and hair aflame as she prayed fervently to Allah. In the courtyard were many servants, but none dared disobey the mistress' orders, namely, to let her suffer the death of her choice.

Sophia made wild efforts to rescue the crazed woman, but her door was locked and the bars at the window denied an opening. Not until Princess Zekie's body was reduced to ashes was Sophia set at liberty. She rushed to the courtyard among the lamenting men and women—Moslems, who deemed the sacrifice an act pleasing in the eye of Allah.

"Our mistress is among the saints now," they said proudly, but their religious fervor did not prevent them from stirring the ashes for melted gold, remnants of the Princess' rich jewelry, and from bemoaning the fact that some very fine silk carpets had gone up in flames.

What a Ship's Barber Earns.

The earnings of a barber on a big ocean liner formed the subject of an interesting case heard recently at Southampton, when the claim for compensation of the wife of a second-class barber on the Titanic was heard. His widow claimed $1,500. It was admitted that the barber only received $5 a month from the company, who, however, provided him with a shop and his food. The claimant put the average earnings at $15, made up of tips, takings, and the proceeds of the sale of souvenirs.

The company disputed the claim, but a sum of $750 was paid into court. One witness, who has served as a second-class barber on the Titanic's sister ship Olympic, gave figures which showed that he made about $2,200 a year. The witness' figures for one voyage were made up as follows:

Shaving, $45.
Haircutting, $11.
Shampooing, $11.
Sale of souvenirs, $35.
Toilet requisites, $15.
Tips, $10.

It was explained that everything in the barber's department cost a quarter.

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He was a buyer in a large wholesale house, and he was in love. One night he snatched a kiss.

"Ah!" he exclaimed. "I am so well pleased with this sample that I should like to negotiate for all you have."

He was accepted on the spot.

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Mrs. Strongheart (preparing for political meeting)—Have you got the bell, the dog whip, the rattle, the fetters, the padlock, the hatchet and my umbrella, Archibald?

Mr. Strongheart—Yes, my dear.

Mrs. Strongheart—Very well, then; let us start.

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