

THE POSITION OF BULGARIA

BULGARIA has shown more readiness than any of our late enemies to carry out the crushing obligations imposed upon her, and the Allies have taken advantage of this attitude to treat her with greater severity than other States which have given more trouble. It may be possible to justify this policy, but it is surely impossible to deny that the Allied Powers, on their part, ought to carry out their Treaty undertakings towards Bulgaria. This they have failed to do.

They undertook, for instance, to provide Bulgaria with a commercial outlet on the Ægean. Not only have they done nothing to fulfil this promise, but the British Government still insists on retaining Greek sovereignty over Western Thrace (where less than a third of the population is Greek), which is equivalent to debarring Bulgaria altogether from direct access to the Mediterranean.

But the question which affects the Bulgarians even more vitally is that of the protection of minorities, for at least a quarter of the Bulgarian race is under the rule of its worst enemies. The Allied Powers have undertaken, in the St. Germain and other Treaties, to safeguard the racial and religious rights of minorities in Serbia, Roumania, and Greece. Since these Treaties were signed, tens of thousands of Bulgarians have been driven from their homes in Macedonia and Thrace ; all Bulgarian schools have been closed, and all Bulgarian churches handed over to the Patriarchists. None of the Allied Powers have done anything to mitigate the persecution. It is said that we ought to wait for two or three years to see how our Balkan Allies treat their alien subjects before taking any action for their protection ; but in two or three years there may be no minorities to protect ! This is a

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matter which specially concerns Catholics, for among the worst sufferers from Greek and Serb intolerance have been the Catholics of Northern Albania and the Bulgarian Uniats of Macedonia. In 1913 a large number of the latter were massacred by the Greeks, while many thousands fled into Bulgaria. Are these people ever to be allowed to return to their homes ; and if so, will they be able to worship in their own churches ? Certainly not, unless the Great Powers compel Greece to display a tolerance which she has never displayed in the past.

It is to be hoped that Catholics will use their influence to promote peace and tolerance in the Balkans. The Church of England is unlikely to do so, for several of its leaders, in their anxiety to cultivate friendly relations with the Greek Patriarchate, are already being used as the unconscious instruments of Greek propaganda. They are presumably unaware that the Patriarchate is a purely Nationalist institution, whose main function in the Balkans has long been to exterminate or forcibly Hellenize the Bulgarian population.

Under the Peace Treaty the Bulgarian army is reduced to 20,000 men, and the country is thus rendered wholly defenceless. The Treaty, however, contains the Covenant of the League of Nations, according to which the independence of each member within its existing frontiers is guaranteed by the other members. Bulgaria has now been admitted to the League, in spite of the opposition of Serbia and Greece ; but does anyone suppose that the League will protect her from aggression ? Albania is a member of the League, yet Serbian troops have been in occupation of a slice of her territory ever since the Armistice, and no attempt has been made to secure their withdrawal to the Treaty frontier.

The Serbians are now threatening reprisals against

Blackfriars

Bulgaria on account of the existence of armed bands in Macedonia. Of course there are bands in Macedonia, as there always will be until Jugoslavia grants autonomy to that province. You cannot subject a million Bulgarians to the rule of Belgrade without trouble ensuing, but the bands have nothing whatever to do with the Bulgarian Government. As British officials in Sofia are well aware, that Government is doing its utmost to prevent any assistance being given to the insurrectionary movements in the neighbouring States—movements which are the inevitable result of the intolerant rule of those States. But it was always foreseen that the activities of the bands would be used by the Serbians and Greeks as an excuse for further bullying of Bulgaria. Travellers returning from Serbia report that an intensely militarist spirit now prevails there, and that a huge standing army is being maintained. If this army is intended for the annexation of more Bulgarian territory, it will be interesting to learn whether the British Government, having insisted on the disarmament of Bulgaria, has any intention of defending her from her powerful and relentless neighbours.

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