

thickens around the "Sick Man's" couch. He holds the key of empire in his trembling grasp. Into whose hands shall it pass when it falls from his? This is the question of the day—the Gordian knot, whose intricacy, insoluble by any diplomatic skill, may, possibly, yield only to the keen edge of the sword.

The receding tide of Ottoman oppression has left of a once great Turkish Empire but a meagre territory under its control. Nearly the whole of Hungary, and even the capital of Austria, were in its power early in the sixteenth century, 1529. Only at the close of the seventeenth century did Hungary become independent, 1699. The Crimea, Odessa, Moldavia, Bessarabia, Transylvania, and Greece, successively threw off the Ottoman yoke.

The last great shrinkage of the Turkish Empire resulted from the Russo-Turkish war, when Roumania, Bosnia, Servia, Herzegovina, Montenegro, Bulgaria, and Eastern Roumelia, through a baptism of blood, won a dear-bought liberty.

The utter collapse of the Ottoman power when it last measured swords with Russia was a surprise to many, but its causes are not far to seek. The civil and military administration were completely honeycombed and worm-eaten by corruption and fraud. The revenue, wrung by extortion from the horny hands of peasants, and the loans raised in the bourses of Paris and London, were lavished on seraglio palaces and barbaric pomps. The ruling classes were enervated and debased by polygamous sensuality. With empty exchequer, repudiated debt, and bankrupt credit, small wonder that the rotten structure at length collapsed. The Turks fought with valour, it is true, and clung to Plevna as a bulldog clings to a

bone. But even a stag will fight when turned to bay, and why should not the stern fatalist, who believes death by the sword to be the gate to paradise?

Even the valour of the Turks is more savage than that of any nation in Europe, or, indeed, in the world. After a battle, hideous Bashi-Bazouks, like human hyenas, prowled over the plain, butchering the wounded and robbing the dead. Even their own wounded the Turks deliberately neglected. Provision for their succour there was almost none. A dead soldier costs nothing, a wounded one costs much, and so they were deliberately left to die.

As in the case of the Byzantine Empire, which they destroyed, the cup of Ottoman iniquity is full. Their rule in the fairest realms of nature has been a blasting and a curse. Misgovernment and oppression and ignorance prevail. Stately cities, once abounding in luxury and wealth, are heaps of ruins. Great rivers, once the highways of commerce, now roll through a scene of desolation. Once populous cities are shrunken into insignificance, or are mouldering mounds of ruin. The tinkling bells of the armed and wandering caravan alone disturb vast solitudes of the cradle-lands of empire.

In Asia Minor and Armenia, under Ottoman rule, a blight seems to rest upon the fairest and most favoured lands on earth. The glory of the Seven Churches has departed; the candlesticks are removed out of their places, and thick darkness has settled upon the land. The beautiful myths of Homer and the sublime Gospel of Christ are alike forgotten, and the Turkish mosque has superseded both pagan fane and Christian temple.

In Europe, Turkey has never been anything but an armed camp. By their terrible Janizaries, and