

HISTORY OF SERVIA.

CHAPTER I.

RETROSPECTIVE SKETCH OF THE RISE OF THE SERVIANS.

The early Sclavonian Tribes. — First traces of the Servian Race. — View of Ancient Servia. — Relations of the Servians to the Greek Empire. — Stephan Boistlaw. — Constantine Monomachus. — The Grand Shupanes. — Crusade of Frederic Barbarossa at the close of the Twelfth Century. — Aversion of the Servians to the Western Church. — New Ecclesiastical Constitution in Servia. — The Servian Kings. — Conflict between the Latins and Greeks. — Stephan Dushan. — Increased Power of the Servians in the Fourteenth Century. — Progress of Civilization. — State of Transition. — Nationality of the Servian Laws.

THE most remarkable and significant epoch in the history of the Sclavonian nations is found towards the close of the ninth century.

The migrations had ceased; immense tracts of country had been taken possession of; and those numerous tribes, of whose names the ancients were scarcely cognisant, had advanced some steps within the limits of historical and geographical recogni-

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tion. Foreign rule, like that of the Avars, had been cast off; and the time was come for the Sclavonians to raise themselves into independence, and to attempt political institutions.

At the period referred to—the latter part of the ninth century—we find the great Moravian kingdom extending beyond Cracow, and far down the Elbe; for even the Zechians in Bohemia formed part of it; and to this day they recollect the great King Swatopluk in Moravia. Then arose amongst the Lechians in the neighbourhood of Gnesne and Posen, the Piasts; the first princes who did not belong to the old race of the people.

It was by a union of Slavonic-Tshudish tribes, under Norman Princes, that the Russian empire was originally formed; taking from the first a decided direction towards the Lower Danube and Constantinople. Meanwhile, the Sclavonian Apostles, Methodius and Cyrillus, traversed all the countries bordering on the Danube, and became distinguished from most of the early missionaries by their endeavours to elevate the standard of the national languages, by using them in the Church service.

At this period also, we hear of the first attempts made by the Servian race towards forming political institutions.

Leaving it to antiquaries to trace out the origin and migrations of these people, by combining languages and myths with fragmentary traditions, it will suffice to say, that from the earliest times we

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find them in the country which they occupy to this day.

In order to take a comprehensive view of ancient Serbia, we must survey the country from a central summit of that lofty range of mountains extending from the Alps to the Black Sea; the declivities of which, with the rivers and streams flowing from them, and the valleys they form, constitute the whole Servian territory between the Danube on one side, and the Adriatic and the Archipelago on the other. The successive heights of these mountain ridges — described in the national songs as variegated woods, where the darkness of the forest is relieved only by white rocks, or by the unmelted snows — have ever been in possession of the Servians. They inhabited the country from the banks of the Drina and the Bosna, towards the Save, along the course of both the Morawas, down to the Danube, and southerly, to Upper Macedonia; peopling, likewise, the coasts of the Adriatic sea. For centuries, they lived under the government of their Shupanes and Elders, regardless of the policy of surrounding nations.

At the period alluded to, the Servians did not, like the rest of the Sclavonians, constitute a distinct state, but acknowledged the supremacy of the Eastern Roman Emperor: in fact the country they inhabited had, from ancient times, formed part of the Roman territory; and it still remained as part of the Eastern Empire when the Western Empire was re-established, at the time of Charlemagne.

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The Servians, at the same period, embraced the Christian faith: but in so doing they did not subject themselves entirely, either to the Empire or Church of the Greeks.

When they determined on acknowledging the supremacy of Constantinople, they did so only on the condition that they should never be subject to a government proceeding from that capital; whose rule they abhorred, as being extortionate and rapacious. The Emperor, accordingly, permitted the Servians to be ruled by native chiefs, solely of their own election; who preserved a patriarchal form of government.*

The records of Christianity were also given to them in their vernacular language and writing; whether these were derived from the East or from the West. They, likewise, also enjoyed the advantage of a liturgy which was intelligible to them; and we find that, early in the tenth century, a considerable number of Sclavonian priests, from all the dioceses, were ordained by the Bishop of Nona, who was himself a Sclavonian by descent.†

Ever since powers have been established on earth, endeavouring to realize, to represent, and to promote those general ideas which involve the destiny of the human race, it would seem that no nation is any longer allowed to develop itself by the unre-

* Constantinus Porphyrogenitus, *De Vitâ Basili*; Theophanes continuatus: ed Bonn, p. 291. τὸς ὑπ' αὐτῶν ἐκείνων ἐκλεγόμενος καὶ οἶονεὶ χειροτονούμενος ὡς αἵρετους ἄρχοντας καὶ πατρικὴν πρὸς αὐτοὺς διασώζειν ὀφείλοντας εὐνοίαν ἄρχειν αὐτῶν διωρίσατο.

† Kopitar, *Glagolita Clozianus*, xiii.

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strained exercise of its own innate strength and genius. The progress of all development depends materially on the relation into which a newly emerging people enters with the nations already in a state of civilization; and in reviewing the history of the various Sclavonian tribes, it is evident that their development was determined by the influence thus exercised upon them.

The Western races — the Moravians, Zechians, Carantaneans, and to some extent, even the Poles — joined themselves to the Western Empire, as renewed among the Germans, and to the Latin Church; taking part in the changing forms of public life which gradually arose.

The Eastern tribes associated with the Eastern Church, in the national form prescribed by it; yet much difference was discernible amongst them.

Russia had become much too powerful through the German immigration, and was also too remote from the centre of the Greek State, for the government at Constantinople to think of making her spiritual dependence the foundation for the secular authority. The Servians, on the contrary, who had settled on the soil of the Greek Empire, and acknowledged its general supremacy, had to strain every nerve against the attempts made by the Emperors to increase their power over them.

In the eleventh century, the Greeks, despite of the stipulations they had entered into, attempted to take Servia under their immediate control, and to subject it to their financial system. In pur-

suance of this design, a Greek governor was sent into the country. But the proceeding incited a general revolt. A Servian chief, Stephan Boistlaw, who was imprisoned at Constantinople, found means to effect his escape, and return to his native land. He quickly assembled the nation around him; and the Greek governor, with his dependents, who are represented to have been mercenary and tyrannical, like their master, were compelled to leave the country. Boistlaw appears to have taken up a position near the coast; vessels from Byzantium, laden with rich treasures, fell into his hands; and he entered into alliance with the Italian subjects of the Greek Empire, who were at that time endeavouring to obtain their freedom.

At length, in the year 1043, Constantine Monomachus, in order to re-establish the dominion he had lost, sent a numerous army, which attempted to penetrate from the coast into the interior. The Servians encountered them in their mountains, as the Tyrolese and Swiss peasants have so often met their enemies, and the entire Greek army was annihilated in their impassable defiles.

This defeat was decisive. Not only did it put a speedy termination to the encroachment of the Court of Constantinople in imposing a direct government, but it also firmly established the princely power of the Grand Shupanes; whose existence depended on the preservation of the national independence.

The importance of this event was felt on both sides. By the Byzantines, the appearance of a

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comet is connected with the reverses which they experienced in Servia.* The most ancient Servian history, that by the Presbyter Diocleas, relates the occurrence with all the embellishments of tradition.†

In the resistance which they had in after times to oppose to the Greeks, it was an advantage to the Servians that they were settled on the borders of Western Christendom: as they derived from it, if not always open aid, at least a certain degree of support.

The Grand Shupanes eagerly sought to ally themselves in marriage with the princely houses of Western Europe; and their chroniclers always mention such alliances with peculiar satisfaction. The Servians rejoiced in being connected with Venice; the relations of which with the Eastern Empire were similar to their own; they also opposed, to the utmost of their power, the attempts of Manuel Comnenus to re-obtain possession of the Western Crown. When Frederic Barbarossa, during his crusade in the year 1189, approached their territory, they displayed an unexpected devotion in his favour, and offered to hold Nissa as a fief from him, and to consider themselves ‡, hence-

* Glykas considers that this comet betokened *τις μελλούσας ιοσμικάς συμφοράς; ὅρα γὰρ ὅτι μετ' οὐ πολὺν σάσις ἐν Σερβία γέγονε* (p. 594. ed Bonn).

† Schwandtner, iii. 497. Dobroslaw is doubtless one and the same person with Boistlaw. According to Diocleas, all the Greek functionaries were murdered in one day.

‡ Ausbert de Expeditione Friderici Imperatoris, p. 32. Pro

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forward, as vassals of the German Empire. Not wishing, however, to offend the Greek Emperor, at a moment when the re-conquest of the Holy Land might be hazarded, Frederic declined the offer. But the proposal even, on the part of the Servians, is worthy of notice. The Servians at times addressed themselves not only to the Emperor, but also to the court of Rome; which did not give up its pretensions to the Illyrian dioceses. Pope Gregory VII. was the first who saluted a Grand Shupane as king.

It might have been expected that the Servian nation, like many of their kindred tribes, would, by degrees, adopt the Western system of the Church. Gregory addressed the Prince already alluded to, not only as "King," but as "Son." The former title, indeed, would hardly have been thought of without the latter. And which of Gregory's successors has not, at one time or other, indulged the hope that the Servians might gradually be won over? It may be doubted whether political considerations alone induced the Servian princes to evince a leaning towards Rome, or whether they really cherished these opinions; but thus much is clear, the time was past for the profession of a new faith.

The Servians had been taught Christianity by Greek teachers from Constantinople, at the very

ipsa terra de manu imperatoris percipienda hominum et fidelitatem ipsi offerebant ad perpetuam Romani imperii gloriam, nullo quidem timore coacti, sed sola ipsius Teutonici regni dilectione invitati.

time when the schisms of the Latin and Greek Churches first broke forth. From the first, they had imbibed the aversion entertained by the Anatolians towards the formulæ of the Western Church — an aversion which, where it has once taken root, has never been conquered. Nemanja was disposed for a union with the German Empire; but this did not prevent him from strengthening the Greek profession of faith, by the erection of numerous churches and cloisters. His views were not directed towards the Vatican, but to the centre point of the orthodox faith — the forest-cloisters of Mount Athos, venerated by all the eastern tribes. He founded Chilandar, and is renowned as one of the renovators of Vatopædi, where he died as a Greek Kaloier.

But the Latin Church presented not only differences in doctrine, but also another system of life and of government, which depended chiefly on the distinction between the Church and the State. A council which Innocent III. caused to be held, at Dioclea, in 1199, founded one of its decrees expressly on the presumption of a fundamental opposition between the two powers.*

In Serbia a totally different state of things arose. From his favourite residence, the hermitage of Chilandar, St. Sawa, the son of Nemanja, promoted the work of his father; and in a truly patriotic

* Concilium in Dalmatiæ et Diocleæ regnis. The VIIIth Canon commences “Cum duæ sint Potestates a deo constitutæ.” Mansi, xxii. 703.

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spirit. The patriarch of Constantinople granted the Servians the privilege of always electing their archbishop from their own national priesthood. St. Sawa himself was the first archbishop. He took up his residence at Uschize, the Servian Mecca, and by his spiritual authority, caused the princely power to be revered in the eyes of the nation, in a manner which the Roman Pope would probably never have been able to accomplish. He raised his brother to the throne, and, so far as can be ascertained, with the consent of the Eastern Emperor; and crowned him in the midst of a vast assemblage of clergy and laity, who, upon that occasion, followed his example in repeating the Creed in its oriental form.

In the Western Empire a deadly conflict was taking place between the ecclesiastical and the secular powers, and a renowned race of intelligent and magnanimous princes were hunted down, like a brood of otters and snakes, by the relentless hatred of the head of the Church; and we find here, also, but too great a similarity of action. Many of the Servian kings, however tyrannical their conduct might have been during their reign, were, after death, honoured as saints; if only at the last they performed some pious act.

It is not necessary here to recount the deeds of these kings*: how they extended their authority

* A complete and authentic history of Serbia cannot be expected, until writings, such as Domitian's Life of St. Simeon and St. Sawa, and the Rodoslow of the Archbishop Danier and his successors, are published: and with a correct text.