

Habsburg H-Net Discussion Network
Henry Wickham Steed on Austrian Foreign Minister Aehrenthal, c. 1908

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**Letter of Bishop Josip Juraj Strossmayer to Mr. William E. Gladstone,
April 11, 1878**

[The following letter is reproduced from Seton-Watson, R.W. *The Southern Slav Question and the Habsburg Monarchy*. London: Constable and Co., 1911. The pagination and all punctuation has been retained from the original.]

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IX. Bishop Strossmayer to Mr. Gladstone, April 11, 1878.

(In German.)

I thank you most heartily for your last letter. It was a great comfort to me. Since then things have grown so much worse that we seem to stand on the verge of a terrible conflagration. God be merciful to poor humanity! According to my most sincere conviction, England is about to commit a gigantic crime. Before the war, during the war, England could have made a peaceful compact with Russia she could do so even now, if she really wished it, and so safeguard her own interests as well as those of Europe. Instead of that she prefers to ally herself with the Hungarians, who know no policy save that of blind hate and aversion towards the Slavs. A strange business! The words of your new Minister for Foreign Affairs come straight from the soul of every true Magyar, from the very mouth of Count Andrassy. In the Austrian monarchy the Slavs are oppressed by the Magyars and the Germans; in the Balkan peninsula the Greeks are to take over the task of subjugating and oppressing the Slavs. That is the gist of your Minister's pronouncements. What a monstrosity; and how unworthy of a great and free nation!

You know that we Slavs wish the Greeks every happiness and every freedom. If it depended on us Greek aspirations would soon be fulfilled, within their just limits; but one thing strikes me forcibly. The Greeks exist rather by virtue of the fame of their ancestors than by their own deserts. I cannot but hold them very largely to blame that the Turkish hordes have penetrated so far into Europe. The fall of Constantinople is an eternal and irreparable disgrace to the Greeks. Foreign peoples had to defend Constantinople against the attacks of the Turks, while the Greeks busied themselves with senseless religious hair-splittings, and while they in their churches were praying God, in stupid and indolent fashion, to save them by a miracle, the Turks were breaking into Constantinople, massacring the degenerate inhabitants, and turning the Christian churches into mosques. Hardly even did the heroic death of their emperor, Constantine XIV., atone for the stupidity and degeneracy of his

people. A second crime committed by the Greeks is, in my opinion, this: that they very easily became accomplices in every way of the Turkish tyranny. The attitude of the Greek Church and the Greek Patriarch towards the Bulgars and Bosniaks has been until quite lately a horrible one. The Phanariot Bishops (513) and priests with their simony and their corruption were during centuries a far worse plague and tyranny for the poor Bulgars and Bosniaks than the Turks themselves.* Finally, their behaviour even latterly has been senseless. While the Turks had the Russians, Roumanians and Serbs by the throat, they did not stir; now they begin to make war. All this, of course, does not prove that one should not grant them their freedom, within just limits, but it does indubitably prove that it would positively be a crime to make use of them to hinder the freedom and independent development of the Slav nation in the Balkan peninsula. An idea fostered by the Magyars, and pressed by them on the Government of the great, free and famous English nation. At such critical moments only one comfort remains to any enlightened friend of justice and humanity, that under a just God every injustice is sooner or later avenged upon its perpetrator. To you and your friends will always remain the glory of having defended the cause of truth, justice and humanity with the utmost self-sacrifice in circumstances of the greatest difficulty.

I can assure you that you have secured our eternal gratitude. As to your comment, my most honoured friend, that often the most pious people work against you, while other less pious support you, let me remark this: that, as the Apostle Paul complains, in every man there are, in our present state, two opposing laws, the "*anima naturaliter christiana*," as Tertullian calls it, and the "*anima pagana*." Unfortunately, even in the best and noblest souls the "*anima pagana*" often triumphs.

As to the new Pope, my dear friend, I know nothing of him. In the last Council he remained absolutely silent. It seems to me, nevertheless, that he is a learned and moderate man. His Secretary of State I know well. He certainly is a fair-minded, cultivated and moderate man. As to the necessary reforms in the Catholic Church we must have patience. It seems to me that Divine Providence has already begun those reforms, through the suspension of the Temporal Power of the Popes, which at any rate in its later developments I held to be harmful rather than useful to the eternal and imperishable calling of the Church. The necessary consequence of this will be, sooner or later, the universalization of the Roman Church, not only in the College of Cardinals, but also in the various Congregations, and the whole apparatus called "*Curia Romana*." The further logical consequence will be the more frequent, and perhaps periodical, meeting of the oecumenical councils, and their re-organization, which

513. So called, because appointed from the Phanar, the residence of the Greek Patriarch in Stambul.

is absolutely necessary in order that they may become the true expression of the motto: "Quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus." I cannot relinquish the hope that God will grant to this ancient Church the power, so sorely needed in the present day, to bring about that unity in the human race which lay so close to the heart of our Lord and Saviour (John xiv.) for which every noble soul here below already longs so ardently, and which is the necessary prelude to that peaceful accord and brotherly feeling which is so sadly lacking in the world to-day; as also to that blessed unity with God in eternity to which we are called. I am but a weak man, belonging to an obscure nation which I love greatly; but so long as there is life left in me I will devote all my poor powers to the attainment of this end. I have kept you too long already with my talk. With sincerest respect, etc.

STROSSMAYER,

Bishop.

April 11, 1878.

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