

Habsburg H-Net Discussion Network
Bishop Strossmayer to Gladstone, 1878

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**Letter of Bishop Josip Juraj Strossmayer to Mr. William E. Gladstone,
February 13, 1878**

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VIII. Bishop Strossmayer to Mr. Gladstone, February 13, 1878.

(In German.)

Forgive me for writing to you once more and taking up your valuable time. First of all I thank you again and again for the splendid proofs of your courage and devotion to the cause of the unhappy Christians of the Illyrian Peninsula. God will reward you and your family for it. By your noble conduct you have done a great service to your own nation also, and even to your Government. To-day the Congress is accepted by all the Powers, the work of peace and pacification begins. Let me make a few observations.

(I) I think it would be worthy not only of this or that party in England, but of the whole great and glorious English nation, to represent at the Congress the principles of humanity and liberty and to allow no petty considerations to divert one from this. I must confess that in this respect I am not without anxiety. When there was a talk in the English Parliament of liberating all North and South Bulgaria, your Premier spoke in a very frivolous and unwise manner. He exclaimed in a somewhat threatening and mocking tone, "So far as the liberation of Bulgaria is concerned there are others there, who will also have a say in the matter in their own interests." Every one among us knows what that means; but every one asks if this is the language of the great England, which seeks to pass in the whole world as the school and stronghold of freedom, morality, humanity and noble activity. Every individual and community lives not merely from material but far more from spiritual bread. Truth and justice is the best policy which peoples and states can follow; this policy triumphs even when it is apparently defeated; while falsehood and injustice lead peoples and states to ruin, even when they seem to triumph. That is what we call Divine Providence, the final hope and often the sole support of oppressed and unhappy peoples. Great peoples possessing culture and the Divine favour (and to these England especially belongs) are called before all others to represent truth, justice and liberty in the world: otherwise they are untrue to themselves and to God. If then I

compare this with the statement of your Premier, he seems to me to say: the liberation of the Bulgarian nation is a just cause, and England as a free nation

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has nothing against it; but for other considerations England will be glad, if others do so. That is surely, to some extent, imitating Pilate, who thought that it is as easy to cleanse one's guilty conscience as to cleanse one's dirty hands with water.

I know, in this country there are people who think it is in the interest of their own freedom and culture, not to permit the freedom and culture of their neighbours to flourish.* But my God, does this principle, or better said, this absurdity, deserve to be supported? Freedom and culture can never be injurious to freedom and culture. What is injurious to them, is slavery and barbarism. Hence all really noble men and all truly free peoples must endeavour that every trace of slavery and barbarism may disappear as soon as possible from the Continent of Europe. The sooner the poor and unhappy peoples of European Turkey are freed from their yoke and restored to liberty and culture, the better for all European peoples without exception. Hence England will not only act in conformity with its natural destiny, if at the Congress it represents to the full the interests of the oppressed peoples; but also will do a material service to those who to-day from blindness and passion oppose the liberation of the peoples of the Thracian Peninsula. England will win morally in the eyes of the whole world, but especially of the oppressed peoples, whose liberation is in question. Moreover, I think that England by representing openly and unreservedly the oppressed peoples, will lend fresh weight to every argument for the protection of its own interests. A contrary attitude on England's part might obviously cause a general conflagration, whose ravages none can foresee. I beg you then, if possible, to work upon your Government in this direction. This will be the crown of your activity hitherto. There are, as you well know, moments in human life when one earns scant recognition in defence of the great principles of truth and justice; but very often it is just such moments which are the loveliest wreath for the memory of the man who did not shrink from staking his own popularity in the service of truth and justice and exposing himself to much abuse.

If I am eager for the liberation of the oppressed peoples of European Turkey, I mean by that not only the Slavs but also the Greeks. This time, it is true, they have behaved most unworthily; just as their behaviour was truly unworthy and shameful when like cowards they lost their capital Constantinople to the advancing Turks. None the less, their liberation also should be achieved to-day, in the interest of humanity and the permanent pacification of these parts of Europe.

Secondly, my noble friend, I have to recommend to you the Serbs and the Montenegrins. So far as the former are concerned, it would be very desirable that all Old Servia should be handed over to them. I do not know how far at present they have victoriously penetrated by force of arms; but this I know for certain, that the Serbs will

only be permanently pacified and deprived of every excuse for revolting, when they are assigned Pristina in the south, then Ipek (or Petsch) in a westerly direction, then further south Prizren, or "Prisrendt" as is written to-day. Each of these towns has for the Serbs a dear and sacred memory. For instance, Prizren was long the residence of their kings. Ipek was long the seat of their supreme Church authority, their Patriarch and a famous monastery. No people on earth easily forgets such precious traditions. Every Serb carries them in his heart and also in his mouth, in the shape of splendid popular songs. In the present excited state of feeling quiet could hardly be reckoned on for a week, if these places so sacred to every Serb were still left in the hands of the Turks.

The Montenegrins with their splendid and truly heroic prince, I hardly need to recommend to you. If any little people deserves the world's admiration, it is this splendid Montenegrin people, which has taken up its abode like an eagle on a lofty and barren crag, in order to buy its freedom and independence by a thousand sacrifices and renunciations for centuries.

Thirdly, I recommend to you, and to your Government if you have any influence in this direction, the Bosnians and Herzegovinians. I am lawfully Bishop of Bosnia, and am therefore in some ways a Divinely appointed defender of Bosnia and Herzegovina. How happy I should be, if it were possible to grant me a place, however modest, at the Congress, so that I might represent the interests of this very worthy, but also much neglected, people.* Since, however, this is impossible, I venture to recommend them most earnestly to you and if possible to your Government. What is just and fair for the Bulgarians, Roumanians and Greeks, is equally just and fair for the poor Bosnians and Herzegovinians, since it was from them that the first impetus came for the present movement and liberation of these peoples. These districts deserve to be freed from their present yoke and to be entrusted with adequate autonomy. In present conditions it would be impossible to entrust the administration of these countries to the hands of the Serbs, with reservation of the Turkish suzerainty--a course which I regard as the most practical; on the other hand, it is not easy to imagine any other suzerainty or influence on an international basis, without great confusion. There is then nothing left, in my opinion, but to make these countries quite autonomous and to retain Turkish suzerainty, perhaps defined by international law. What I consider to be extremely important for these countries, is that the Eastern Orthodox Church should be freed as soon as possible from the shameful yoke of Phanariotism. Till now the Bishops here have been Phanariots, who bought their office for hard cash from the Patriarch in Constantinople, in order to compensate themselves a hundredfold for this price by more than Turkish exactions.* That such Bishops did not understand the language of the people, and that they kept the

Orthodox clergy in ghastly ignorance, and entirely neglected all the duties of their calling, goes without saying.* Henceforth this people ought to have a Bishop from among itself, who, knowing its language and customs and loving it, will attend to its spiritual interests better than before.* So far as the Catholic Church is concerned, it has been hitherto far better served, but even in this respect changes are absolutely necessary, and these I shall discuss with Rome quite openly. I know you are too much occupied to reply: I only ask you to see that some one acknowledges the due receipt of this letter.

With true respect and admiration, I remain your admirer and friend,

STROSSMAYER

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