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**The Secret Mission of Noel Buxton to Bulgaria,
September, 1914 - January, 1915.**

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**A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial
fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Arts.**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is devoted to an unsuccessful mission to Sofia undertaken in the fall of 1914 by Noel Buxton, a Liberal British M. P., who aimed to win Bulgaria over to the side of the Triple Entente. Although referred to on occasion in works having to do with the conduct of British foreign policy during the First World War, the affair has never before been described in full. Through a close examination of hitherto unexploited material from Buxton's own archive, it has been possible to reconstruct the evolution of the mission, analyze its contemporary significance, and suggest its relevance to current trends towards the moralization and democratization of diplomacy.

RESUME

Cette thèse a comme sujet le voyage effectué à Sofia, en automne, 1914, par Noel Buxton, membre du parlement anglais, afin de persuader la Bulgarie de secourir les membres du triple entente. Malgré le fait qu'on y retrouve parfois des allusions dans les oeuvres ayant affaire avec la politique étrangère de l'Angleterre durant la première guerre mondiale, ce mission n'a jamais été étudié de près. Grâce à un examen des documents personnels de Buxton, il a maintenant été possible de fournir des détails auparavant inconnus sur cet épisode inusité.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	i
Acknowledgments	ii
Introduction	1
Chapter I	6
Chapter II	24
Chapter III	61
Conclusion	87
Bibliography	93

INTRODUCTION

It had been Britain's hope upon the outbreak of World War One that Bulgaria would honor traditional Russophile and Anglophile loyalties and remain benevolently neutral, at the very least, in the forthcoming conflict between the Triple Entente and the Dual Alliance. Instead, by mid-August, 1914, it had become apparent that Bulgaria's King Ferdinand, and his Prime Minister, Vasil Radoslavov, were inclined to lead their country into an alliance with the Central Powers.

Noel Edward Buxton, a British M. P., suggested that he travel directly to Sofia in an attempt to redress the situation. As we shall see, Buxton, having undertaken six prior expeditions to the Balkans, was in close contact with several important politicians in the Bulgarian Opposition. Sir Edward Grey, the British Foreign Secretary, was nonetheless reluctant to sanction the proposal, fearing that Buxton might disrupt normal diplomatic channels and impede the direction of Foreign Office policy with regards to Serbia and Greece. Buxton therefore enlisted the support of Cabinet members David Lloyd George and Winston Churchill; and Grey was ultimately persuaded to approve in principle the idea of a "study" mission to Bulgaria. However, after his arrival in Sofia in early September, 1914, Buxton exceeded his mandate by unsuccessfully politicking to bring Bulgaria directly into the war on the Allied side. His activities gave rise to consternation not only in Berlin, Vienna, and Constantinople, but also to the Allied governments in Nis, Athens, and London itself. Buxton came to be perceived within the British Foreign Office

as a dangerous nuisance to the wider interests of the Entente, and was accorded a rather hostile reception by the British government upon his return home in January, 1915.¹

The story of Buxton's mission to Bulgaria is of obvious importance to anyone interested in the conduct of British foreign policy during the First World War, as well as to those with an interest in the historical background to the modern tendency to make foreign policy a subject of democratic politics. However, surprisingly little has been published, in Western languages at least, regarding the precise circumstances of the genesis of Buxton's mission, or the nature of his subsequent activities in the Balkans. Secrecy was one reason for this deficiency: Buxton himself noted in his personal records that it was deemed "against interests of country" to divulge specifics about the mission during the course of the War and after the Armistice.² Perhaps this also explains why Grey, Churchill, and Lloyd George, respectively, in their own voluminous autobiographical retrospectives, allude only in passing, if at all, to the affair.³

The first account of Buxton's wartime activities seems to have appeared only in 1932, when his private secretary, T. P. Conwell-Evans, published Foreign Policy from a Back Bench 1904-1918. Conwell-Evans had access to Buxton's personal records, and provided an accurate, but inadequate, overview of the salient points of the affair. The only other relevant full-length work is a 1952 biography of Buxton written by Mosa Anderson,⁴ whose account of the 1914 mission echoes that of Conwell-Evans. In fact,

¹ Michael G. Fry, Lloyd George and Foreign Policy, (vol. 1. Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 1977) 282.

² Noel Buxton's notes; holograph; n. d.. Noel Buxton Papers (hereafter cited as N. B. P.): Box 64; File 1.

³ Viz. Grey of Fallodon: Twenty-Five Years 1892-1916. (3 vols.; 1925); Lloyd George: War Memoirs of David Lloyd George. (4 vols.; 1933); Churchill: The World Crisis. (2 vols.; 1923).

⁴ Mosa Anderson, Noel Buxton, A Life. (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1952).

Foreign Policy from a Back Bench appears to constitute the primary source of information for most succeeding references (generally *in passim*) to the mission which appear in various works having to do with British foreign policy during the War. Two journal articles do draw directly upon Buxton's personal records, the first written by H. N. Fieldhouse in 1966,⁵ and the second by Robert Vogel in 1990.⁶ However, these provide only a modicum of additional information about the mission itself, although Fieldhouse is strong on Buxton's later propaganda activities in London. Similarly, Michael G. Fry, in Lloyd George and Foreign Policy, (1977), provides an instructive account of Lloyd George's collaboration with Buxton, but is short on specifics insofar as the mission is concerned. Finally, Ivan Ilcev, working from Bulgarian sources in his 1982 article "Great Britain and Bulgaria's Entry Into the First World War (1914-1915)," contributes a brief, albeit useful reference to Buxton's activities in Bulgaria.

However, the raw material for a more in depth investigation of Buxton's 1914 mission exists in the form of his personal papers, which constitute the basis of the investigation which follows. Housed in the Department of Rare Books and Special Collections of the McLennan Library of McGill University in Montreal,⁷ the Noel Buxton collection is made up of 72 box-files of varying dimensions, all of which contain a

⁵ H. N. Fieldhouse, "Noel Buxton and A. J. P. Taylor's *The Trouble-Makers*." A Century of Conflict 1850-1950. (ed. Martin Gilbert. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1966) 173-198.

⁶ Robert Vogel, "Noel Buxton: The 'Trouble-Maker' and His Papers." Fontanus. (3 (1990) 131-150).

⁷ The Buxton Files were acquired by the University in 1961 through the offices of H. N. Fieldhouse, with some later additions to the collection following in 1968, although it is unclear how exactly the Papers came to leave the Buxton family's possession. A smaller aggregation can also be found in the William R. Perkins Library of Duke University, and individual documents apparently still turn up from time to time in the hands of dealers in London.

profusion of printed and handwritten documents and notes. The size and content of the aggregation reflect the range of Buxton's activities, and his efforts, in the words of Fieldhouse,

to influence the already influential; to do this by the untiring submission of memoranda of information and argument, and by the machinery of committee and deputation. The recipients of the memoranda and of the deputations were the politically established and the culturally articulate.⁸

In the process, Buxton wrote three books, collaborated in numerous others, contributed prolifically to various journals, produced innumerable pamphlets and letters to the press, and conducted a private correspondence of vast dimensions with many people of public note.⁹ Through a painstaking¹⁰ examination of his personal records, it has been possible to trace the evolution of Buxton's 1914 mission to Bulgaria, and so provide new insight into a hitherto unelucidated sideshow to the First World War.

So as to provide a certain amount of essential contextual information, this thesis will begin with a preliminary chapter devoted to Buxton's personal background and pre-1914 propaganda efforts in London on behalf of Bulgaria through the offices of his Balkan Committee, a brief synopsis of the Balkan Wars of 1912 and 1913, and an account of ensuing diplomatic developments in Bulgaria up to the eve of World War One. Chapter II focuses on events from late August, 1914, when Buxton was involved in discussions with the Foreign Office regarding the substance of his mission, and follows

⁸ Fieldhouse, 186.

⁹ Vogel, 146.

¹⁰ Unfortunately, important as it is for scholars, the very size of the aggregation, and its disorganization, discourages use. While it is likely that the material was at one time more rationally arranged, the only finding aid is woefully inadequate for the purposes of serious research.

his journey to Bulgaria and activities in Sofia from September 6 until his departure for Romania on October 2, 1914. Chapter III details Buxton's progress in Bucharest, and after his subsequent return to Sofia, prior to his return to London on January 6, 1915. An analytical conclusion completes the thesis.

CHAPTER I

Under the terms of the Treaty of San Stefano, imposed upon the Ottoman Empire on March 3, 1878, a "Greater Bulgaria," extending from the Adriatic to the Aegean and Black Seas was to have been created under the aegis of Russia. However, the idea of such a large Russian satellite in the Balkans was unacceptable to the other Great Powers of Europe. Tsar Alexander II was consequently forced into agreement with the decrees of the Congress of Berlin, whereby Bulgaria was confined to the north of the Balkan range as an autonomous principality under Ottoman suzerainty, and considerable parts of Macedonia were restored to direct Turkish rule.

The prime mover at Berlin had been the incumbent British Prime Minister, Benjamin Disraeli. Careless or ignorant of the wider political realities which underlay his demarche, a significant segment of British public opinion, buoyed by Christian traditions of intolerance towards the infidel, insisted that Britain had therefore a special moral obligation to ensure that Macedonia was "properly" governed. In spectacular fashion, William Ewart Gladstone assumed immediate leadership of the cause, culminating with his Midlothian campaign of 1879-1880. In the early years of the twentieth century, however, there arose a new, albeit less flamboyant, champion: Noel Edward Buxton.

Buxton had been a Liberal Member of the British Parliament for Whitby in 1905-1906 and Norfolk North since 1910, and had distinguished himself through his powerful social conscience and advocacy of various humanitarian causes. He came from a family with a tradition of liberal reform and Christian philanthropy: Buxton's great grandfather, the first Baronet Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton, had played an important role in the

emancipation of the slaves throughout the British Empire.¹ Noel Buxton's perspective on life had been broadened through an 1892 voyage around the world, which had served to undermine his belief in the propriety of class privilege.² He was later to reflect upon his impressions:

My idea is that we who lead a secure and comfortable life are woefully cut off from realities. If Christ is any guide, every human being is of value; and we must be concerned for all, but to care for them at all we must go out of our way to understand their outlook. Our way of life cuts us clean off from theirs and our class standards, even cleanliness itself, make it seem almost a duty to keep aloof ... I am inordinately proud of the family concern for wrongs, social and personal ... all this life we are asked to shut our eyes.³

In 1899, Buxton chose, in the Gladstonian tradition, to visit Macedonia, and professed to be appalled by what he perceived as the distress and misery of the Christian populations of Turkish Europe. He thereupon dedicated himself to improving the condition of the Macedonian unfortunates, and subsequently to securing all of Macedonia for Bulgaria:

I think the evils of Turkish rule are such that to diminish them is well worth risking my life. The savagery ... which animates a proud and dominant race ... [permeates] its dealings with unarmed and helpless subjects, despised for their religion and hated for their superior brains. The mass of pain and waste, resulting from general disorder, murder, violation and robbery is such that I have constantly felt one ought gladly to give one's life to relieve it even a little.⁴

¹ Anderson, 17.

² *Ibid.*, 28.

³ Noel Buxton to Lucy Buxton; 1914 12 20; copy. N. B. P.: Box 13; File 1 (Buxton's emphasis).

⁴ Noel Buxton to Lucy Buxton; 1914 10 27; holograph; *Ibid.*

As a first step in that direction, Buxton in 1902 founded the Balkan Committee, and induced the eminent James Bryce⁵ to become its president. Bryce had endorsed Buxton's idea of forming a body

to watch the progress of events in Macedonia and the Turkish East generally ... confined to obtaining and diffusing information and views, exciting interest in the subject and advocating measures calculated to secure peace, and put an end to oppression, bloodshed and cruelty.⁶

The Committee set about trying to persuade British Foreign Secretary Lord Lansdowne to take some responsibility for the situation in Macedonia. For the most part this was effected through an enormous number of petitions to the Foreign Office and other influential bodies or persons, as well as through the personal propagandizing of members of the group.⁷ The clout carried by the group's members, a judicious mixture of politicians, ecclesiastical dignitaries, professors, journalists, and wealthy businessmen,⁸ gave Noel Buxton, as Chairman, and after 1907, President of the Committee, ready access to the leaders of the British Government.⁹ During its first five or six years of

⁵ James Bryce, M. P., a respected constitutional scholar, had been Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs in 1886, and would later serve as ambassador to Washington from 1907 to 1913.

⁶ James Bryce to Noel Buxton; 1903 07 05. T. P. Conwell-Evans, Foreign Policy from a Back Bench 1904-1908: A Study Based on the Papers of Lord Noel-Buxton, (London: Oxford UP. 1932) 3.

⁷ Fieldhouse, 179.

⁸ Over the years, members and supporters included, among others, the Earl of Aberdeen, Canon Barnett, J. D. Bouchier, Lady and Sir E. Boyle, H. N. Brailsford, Lord Brassey, G. Cadbury, Lady F. Cavendish, the Rev. Dr. Clifford, B. Christian, M. E. Durham, Sir Arthur Evans, Lord Farrer, Lord E. Fitzmaurice, M. P., A. G. Gardiner, H. Gladstone, M. P., G. P. Gooch, Bishop Gore, J. L. Hammond, C. Harris, the Bishop of Hereford, Canon Scott Holland, H. Law, M. P., the Earl of Lytton, Canon Maccoll, C. F. G. Masterman, W. A. Moore, H. Nevinson, A. Ponsonby, R. A. Scott James, A. Spicer, Lord Stanmore, C. P. Trevelyan, M. P., G. Trevelyan, L. Villari, Prof. Westlake, P. W. Wilson, the Bishop of Worcester, and H. Young. N. B. P.: Box 56b; Files 2 and 3. Conwell-Evans, 4.

⁹ Vogel, 138.

existence, the Committee played a particularly important role in influencing public opinion and the government of the day.¹⁰ In fact, it strengthened the position of Lansdowne, who, unlike many of his Conservative colleagues, was himself sympathetic to the Macedonian cause.¹¹

Noel Buxton's influence ensured that the Balkan Committee, its official title notwithstanding, remained unabashedly pro-Bulgarian in orientation. For instance, it was glibly assumed that all of Macedonia was part of unredeemed Bulgaria, despite equally convincing Serbian and Greek claims to the contrary.¹² This alienated not only potential supporters, but from time to time members of the Committee itself.¹³ Buxton and his colleagues also tended to ignore persistent evidence of intra-Christian atrocities in Macedonia, even when such evidence was provided by their own allies.¹⁴ Moreover, this single-minded approach sometimes left the Committee incapable of fathoming many of the intricacies of Great Power politics in the Balkans.¹⁵ Nonetheless, the policies of the Balkan Committee always sounded, at least, both sensible and moderate to the average listener, and were advocated with righteous indignation over the apparent disinterest or

¹⁰ Conwell-Evans, 3.

¹¹ Douglas Dakin, The Greek Struggle in Macedonia 1897-1913 (Thessaloniki: Institute for Balkan Studies, 1966) 150.

¹² The question has still not been adequately resolved. For a detailed and unbiased analysis of the Macedonian ethnic intermixture at the time of the Great War see British Naval Intelligence Division, Jugoslavia, (vol. II. Geographical Handbook Series. Great Britain: 1944.) 117ff.

¹³ Perhaps the most prominent of such dissidents was British M. P. Aubrey Herbert, who resigned on January 10 1913 in protest of the "partizan attitude ... which favoured the Bulgarian at the expense of the Greek and Moslem inhabitants of Macedonia." Fieldhouse, 181.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 180.

¹⁵ Vogel, 138.

inactivity of others. All of this led to Buxton's becoming a source of enormous irritation to successive editions of the British Foreign Office.¹⁶ On occasion, however, the Foreign Office was nonetheless compelled by the Committee's prestige and public support to depart from its customary reticence in favor of long, reasoned replies promising action.¹⁷

However, after 1905, the Committee had no wish to weaken the newly elected Liberal Government, which represented the party to which Buxton and most of the members of the Committee belonged.¹⁸ Although objecting in principle to the "imperialist" wing of the party, represented by the new Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Grey, and Prime Minister Herbert H. Asquith,¹⁹ the Committee remained dependent on persuading the Foreign Office or the cabinet to act on its recommendations. However, not only was Grey less inclined than had been his predecessor to cater to the demands of the Balkan Committee, but, unlike Lansdowne, Grey could rely on Opposition votes against his own back-benchers.²⁰

Regardless, in the Ottoman Empire especially the belief persisted that the Balkan Committee exercised an inordinate amount of influence, and therefore the Young Turks

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Conwell-Evans, 8.

¹⁸ Vogel, 138.

¹⁹ Buxton and his friends were opposed to the extent to which democratic England was excluded from the country's decision-making processes. Specifically, they disagreed with the prevailing legal opinion that parliamentary sanction was needed neither for signing nor for ratifying treaties, except in the case of peacetime accords which incurred definite financial obligations or ceded territory. See Keith G. Robbins, "The Foreign Secretary, the Cabinet, Parliament and the Parties." (Hinsley 3-21) 3.

²⁰ F. R. Bridge, "Relations with Austria-Hungary and the Balkan States, 1905-1914." (Hinsley 165-177) 167.

took pains to court Buxton after their rise to power in 1908.²¹ The considerable support which had been given to the Revolution by the Christian communities in Macedonia encouraged Buxton to moderate his views, and he was also pragmatic enough to recognize the potential for increased British influence at Constantinople.²² He accepted an invitation to visit the incumbent Sultan Abdul Hamid II and the Young Turk government in December of 1909. However, when nationalist elements amongst the Young Turks eventually emerged to follow traditional policies of oppression towards their subject populations in Macedonia (and also Armenia), Buxton and his colleagues, in their disillusionment, became even more anti-Turk than ever.²³

Partly as a result of the Committee's activities, Grey did admit in 1911 that it would be impossible for Britain to side with any policy in the Balkans designed to repress Bulgaria.²⁴ Usually, though, the Foreign Secretary took the line that, in other countries,

whatever the humane sentiments of individuals may have been about their own affairs, they did not take the form of pressure for philanthropic action abroad that might involve their own government in complications with continental neighbours.²⁵

²¹ See, for example, cordial letters from Enver Bey to Noel Buxton; 1910 04 08 and 1911 07 29; N. B. P.: Box 25, File 6; Talaat Bey to Noel Buxton; 1911 02 25; holograph. N. B. P.: Box 56b; File 1; and also telegrams from "La Grande Nation Unie et le Partie Parlementaire Union et Progress" to Noel Buxton; 1909 02 13 and 1909 97 06; N. B. P.: Box 56a, File 1.

²² Dakin, 399.

²³ Vogel, 138.

²⁴ Keith G. Robbins, "Public Opinion, the Press and Pressure Groups." (Hinsley 70-88) 86.

²⁵ quoted in Fieldhouse, 175.

Noel Buxton was of course among those who had other ideas on the matter, and the Agadir Crisis²⁶ publicly exposed the aforementioned rift between Buxton and Grey. Along with his nephew Arthur Ponsonby, Buxton formed the Liberal Foreign Affairs group, and staged, in the judgement of A. J. P. Taylor, a "somewhat ineffectual" attack on Grey's foreign policy in November 1911.²⁷ Naturally, the Foreign Office, which did not escape from the general denunciation, rose to Grey's defense,²⁸ and the pronouncements of the Balkan Committee, although significantly reduced in political relevance, grew disproportionately strident.

The tension between Noel Buxton and Sir Edward Grey accumulated during the pre-1914 period was to affect significantly their conduct vis-à-vis Bulgaria during the first year of the Great War. On the basis of Noel Buxton's claim to have personal access to special indigenous sources of information about Bulgarian politics, he and his friends would virtually style themselves as an alternative Foreign Office with respect to the Balkans.²⁹

However, a preliminary overview of political developments in the Balkans during the period immediately preceding the onset of Buxton's expedition in 1914 is in order. due to the fact that political attitudes in 1914-1915 Bulgaria were very much predetermined by the recent upheavals of the Balkan Wars.

²⁶ Buxton, while not a pacifist *per se*, was always very much concerned with giving Germany what he considered to be its colonial entitlements.

²⁷ A. J. P. Taylor, The Trouble Makers: Dissent Over Foreign Policy 1792-1939, (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1957) 117.

²⁸ Zara Steiner, "The Foreign Office Under Sir. Edward Grey, 1905-1914." (Hinsley 22-69) 46.

²⁹ Fieldhouse, 182.

* * *

The September, 1911 outbreak of war between the Ottoman Empire and Italy in North Africa had provided an irresistible opportunity for cooperation amongst the usually fractious Balkan states against the Turkish presence in the region.³⁰ An agreement between Bulgaria and Serbia providing for an equitable division of Macedonia between themselves was reached under Russian auspices in early 1912.³¹ Bulgaria then joined Serbia in a military alliance with Greece, despite the failure of the Bulgarians and Greeks to satisfactorily resolve long-standing frontier disputes in Salonica (Thessaloniki) and Thrace. Montenegro subsequently joined the alliance as well, and the First Balkan War resulted in Turkey's loss of all of its European possessions except for a small ribbon around Constantinople. However, when peace negotiations opened in London on December 16, 1912, Austria-Hungary insisted upon the withdrawal of Serbian troops from the Adriatic coast, where an Albanian state had been proclaimed on November 28, 1912. Shortly after that crisis was deferred through the *de jure* recognition of Albania as an independent state, war with Turkey resumed in January 1913, following a coup d'état in Constantinople. The Balkan allies were once again victorious, and the Treaty of London was signed on May 30, 1913, which assigned to Bulgaria a southern frontier running from Enos (Enez), on the Aegean, to Midia (Kiyiköy) on the Black Sea.

³⁰ Dimitrije V. Djordjevic et al., "History of the Balkans." *Encyclopaedia Britannica: Macropaedia* (1984 ed.) 630-631. More detailed and comprehensive accounts of the Balkan Wars, written from various national perspectives, are also widely available.

³¹ Macedonia was to be divided into Bulgarian and Serbian zones, with a central, unassigned region held in reserve and termed, curiously enough, the "uncontested" zone.

However, the Serbs refused to accept the partition of Macedonia detailed by their 1912 treaty with Bulgaria on the grounds that they had been forced to withdraw from the Adriatic, and the frontier disputes between Bulgaria and Greece flared up again as well. Furthermore, although Romanian claims in the area seemed to have been settled through the April 1913 Protocol of Petrograd, Romania demanded from Bulgaria a part of its southeastern Dobruja region as compensation for having - due supposedly to Great Power pronouncements in favor of such a course - remained neutral in the preceding conflict. On June 1, 1913, Serbia and Greece concluded an alliance against Bulgaria. Serbia was still prepared to accept an option of Tsarist arbitration which had been provided for in the original agreement over Macedonia, but only if new territorial arrangements would entirely supersede that engagement. This was unacceptable to Bulgaria however, which anticipated that Russia might be anxious to strengthen Serbia against Austria. Although they struck an intransigent pose in their dealings with the Tsar, the Bulgarians assumed nonetheless that Russia would maintain traditional Slavic feelings of solidarity and prevent the potential dismemberment of Bulgaria by its Balkan neighbors.

To the dismay of the Bulgarians, however, Russia announced that they must either accept the Tsar's arbitration or suffer the consequences alone. The Bulgarian military commander, General Savov, apparently without the approval of the cabinet but with the likely connivance of King Ferdinand,³² decided instead on a pre-emptive strike, and on June 30, 1913, attacked Serbia and Greece. However, the latter countries were both fully prepared for just this eventuality; Romania, meanwhile, invaded Dobruja, and the

³² Djordjevic et al., 135.

Ottomans took advantage of the opportunity to recapture Adrianople from Bulgaria as well. Through the Treaty of Bucharest, signed on August 10, 1913, Romania procured its part of Dobruja, and Greece obtained Salonica, Kavalla, and the coastal part of Macedonia. Serbia gained northern and central Macedonia, leaving Bulgaria with only the Strumnica region in the easternmost part of that territory.

The debacle put Bulgaria's new Liberal government, headed by the Russophile Vasil Radoslavov, in a somewhat precarious position. The loss of Macedonia was perceived as a national humiliation, while Dobruja had been Bulgaria's most productive and advanced agricultural region. Its loss also negated the strategic and commercial importance of the Black Sea port of Varna. Bulgaria therefore found itself in need of a large foreign loan to finance the accelerated development of extremely backward areas, as well as to repair the general costs of the Balkan wars.³³ Radoslavov advocated that Bulgaria make a final break with Russia and turn instead towards the Central Powers, with whose cooperation revenge could be exacted on Serbia and Greece in the near future.³⁴ However, the vain and arrogant Ferdinand was personally disliked by the volatile Kaiser Wilhelm II, and initial efforts to raise funds in Vienna and Berlin were unsuccessful.

However, similar endeavors in Paris failed as well, due largely to Russia's insistence upon an unequivocal commitment to the Entente as a condition of any loan.

³³ Richard J. Crampton, Bulgaria 1878-1918: A History (New York: Columbia UP, 1983) 427.

³⁴ Z. A. B. Zeman, A Diplomatic History of the First World War, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971) 73.

Although Russian diplomacy envisioned that a reconciled Bulgaria and Serbia could forestall possible Austrian designs on Asia Minor, Tsar Nicholas II also wished to cow the formerly compliant Bulgarians. The Russian minister in Sofia, Alexander Savinsky, adopted a patronizing attitude and intrigued against the Radoslavov government.³⁵ Great Britain, meanwhile, remained somewhat aloof from the Continental proceedings, and deferred to the Russian protocol.

Bulgaria therefore turned once again in the direction of the Central Powers, which by the spring of 1914 were far more accommodating than they had been initially. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Sazonov correspondingly moderated his stance, insisting only that the Bulgarian government be "well-disposed" to the Entente, but this implied the dismissal of Radoslavov, which Ferdinand refused to contemplate.³⁶ Although the French government approved a personal loan to Ferdinand, the dislocation of the money market occasioned by the July Crisis brought the announcement that France would be unable to make a loan available before the end of the year under any circumstances.³⁷

Radoslavov then tabled in the Bulgarian *Sobranie* a proposed German loan agreement, which was denounced by almost the whole of the Opposition, but passed amidst apparently well-founded accusations of voting fraud on the part of the Government.³⁸ Some of the terms of the loan infringed upon Bulgaria's economic

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Crampton, 432.

³⁷ Keith G. Robbins, "British Diplomacy and Bulgaria 1914-1915." Slavonic and East European Review (49.117, (Oct. 1971): 560-585) 564.

³⁸ Crampton, 435.

independence,³⁹ and the international implications of the decision in favor of Germany offended traditional Slavic and Orthodox sympathies.

On July 29, Ferdinand nonetheless proclaimed Bulgaria's intention not to deviate from an official policy of "strict and loyal neutrality" in the incipient war between Austria-Hungary and Serbia, and instituted measures designed to give credibility to the declaration.⁴⁰ In actuality, Radoslavov already had sent a secret proposal to the German and Austrian ministers that their governments should explore the possibility of a military convention and alliance. But when the terms were eventually put to Ferdinand, the King judged that the German offer of that part of Macedonia which was "ethnically and historically" Bulgarian was too vague to justify immediate action.⁴¹

Bulgaria did conclude on August 6 a secret alliance with Turkey, which contained a provision for mutual aid in the event of an attack by any other Balkan state or states. It was however agreed that Bulgaria would under no circumstances undertake any offensive military action in agreement with Turkey until an adequate guarantee from Romania had been obtained.⁴² It would be five months before any of the Great Powers learned of the

³⁹ For instance, German companies were given effective control over Bulgaria's major coal field, the prime source of fuel for the state's railroad network. *Ibid.*, 433.

⁴⁰ The incursion of Bulgarian raiding parties into Serbia was halted and some Macedonians were disarmed, known Austrian and Turkish agents were removed from Danube ports so as to safeguard the passage of Russian vessels taking supplies to Serbia, and conciliation was shown towards Romania in various minor frontier disputes. *Ibid.*, 434.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 435.

⁴² The Romanian Government had already secretly decided to renounce a clause in the 1913 Treaty of Bucharest which pledge it to assist Serbia in case of a Bulgarian invasion. However, the Bulgarian government had not been informed of this. Zeman, 80.

existence of that treaty. On the same day, Radoslavov also reassured the British Minister in Sofia, Sir Henry Bax-Ironside, that Bulgaria still intended to remain neutral.⁴³

On August 12 the Bulgarian government reiterated, this time publicly, its commitment to neutrality, which in any case was popular with a Bulgarian populace still reeling from the losses of 1912 and 1913. Most Bulgarians were also loath to fight alongside the Germans and the Austrians, not to mention the Turks, and while Russia might have lost some of its traditional status in Bulgaria, there would be great internal opposition to fighting against the Tsar.⁴⁴ Moreover, Britain's entry into the war on August 4 constituted an additional motivation behind Ferdinand's temporizing vis-à-vis the Central Powers. Not only did Great Britain represent a formidable fighting force, but the absence of direct British strategic interests in the Balkans, as well as the support which British Bulgarophiles had lent to Bulgarian national aspirations over the preceding two decades, were widely recognized within Bulgarian political circles. On the other hand, the Opposition was divided, and with the minor exception of some small groups directly subsidized by the Russian legation, none dared openly to call for Bulgaria's entry into the war on the Allied side.⁴⁵ The idea of rendering direct military assistance to Serbia was an anathema to all segments of Bulgaria society.

⁴³ Sir Henry Bax-Ironside to Sir Edward Grey; 1914 08 06. David Stevenson, ed. The First World War, 1914-1918. (part II, series H, vol. 1. British Documents of Foreign Affairs. eds. Kenneth Bourne and D. Cameron Watt. University Publications of America, 1989) 5.

⁴⁴ Crampton, 435.

⁴⁵ Some did go so far as to suggest that for Bulgaria to align itself against the Entente would be a "fateful mistake." Only in March 1915 did the Opposition, encouraged by initial Anglo-French successes in the Dardanelles, begin openly to call for Bulgaria's immediate entry into the war. Ivan Ilcev, "Great Britain and Bulgaria's Entry Into the First World War (1914-1915)." Bulgarian Historical Review (10.4 (1982): 29-48) 34, 40.

Although Britain had hitherto declined to interfere in the Balkan tangle, the arrival of the German cruisers *Goeben* and *Breslau* in the Dardanelles on August 8 and their nominal sale to Turkey made it obvious that the Ottoman Empire was inclined to join the Central Powers.⁴⁶ At the outset of the war, Prime Minister Eleutherios Venizelos of Greece had suggested that the way to deter Ottoman intervention would be to reconstitute a Balkan bloc. As a prerequisite to such a scenario, however, Serbia, Greece, and probably Romania would have to make concessions to Bulgaria to compensate for its losses in the Second Balkan war. As an inducement, the Entente offered Bosnia, Hercegovina, and an outlet on the Adriatic to Serbia, and to Greece concessions in Asia Minor, but neither country proved receptive. Grey rejected Sazonov's suggestion that the Entente exert pressure on Greece or Serbia for fear it might alienate them.⁴⁷ Although the vague Entente suggestions had made little immediate impression on Ferdinand and Radoslavov,⁴⁸ on August 15 Bax-Ironside nonetheless reported that "prospects of a Balkan confederation look far from hopeless".⁴⁹ On August 24, however, Radoslavov once again informed Bax-Ironside of Bulgaria's continued determination to maintain its neutrality.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Robbins, 1971, 565.

⁴⁷ Kenneth J. Calder, Britain and the Origins of the New Europe, 1914-1918 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1976) 31.

⁴⁸ Robbins, 1971, 565.

⁴⁹ Sir Henry Bax-Ironside to Sir Edward Grey; 1914 08 15. Stevenson, 25.

⁵⁰ Sir Henry Bax-Ironside to Sir Edward Grey; 1914 08 24 and 1914 08 26. *Ibid.*, 47, 49.

On August 18, meanwhile, the Entente had offered to guarantee Ottoman independence in return for its strict neutrality. However, the Ottoman reply of August 20 demanded additional concessions, which Grey considered excessive.⁵¹ On the same day that the Entente made its offer to Turkey, Venizelos, fearing that Turkey might possibly declare war on Greece alone, made a formal offer to place the naval and military forces of Greece at the disposal of the Entente powers. However, fearing that acceptance of Venizelos' overture would immediately bring Turkey, and possibly even Bulgaria into the war on the opposite side, the British Cabinet decided to express cordial acknowledgment to Venizelos, but not to accept the offer. Grey also professed to be concerned about the Russian reaction to possible Greek designs on Constantinople⁵² and was certainly conscious of Moslem sensitivity in Egypt and India.⁵³ At any rate, he believed that Sir Louis Mallet, the British minister in Constantinople, who was close to the Grand Vizier, Said Halim Pasha, would be able to keep the peace⁵⁴ and forestall any demarche by the leaders of hawkish Committee of Union and Progress, the effective ruling party of the Ottoman Empire.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Robbins, 1971, 566.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Paul Guinn, British Strategy and Politics 1914 to 1918. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965) 42.

⁵⁴ Churchill had not helped matters by impounding on July 28 two unfinished Turkish battleships from a shipyard on the Tyne river in Britain. As the construction of one of the vessels had been financed through a popular subscription in Turkey, their detention caused widespread resentment of Britain throughout the Ottoman Empire.

⁵⁵ Winston S. Churchill, The World Crisis. (vol. I. Toronto: Macmillan Company of Canada Ltd., 1923) 530. The Ottoman Empire was in theory a constitutional monarchy in which the reigning Sultan Caliph and his ministers were controlled by an elected parliament. However, following a military *coup* in January 1913, the Unionists had achieved supreme military and political power, and had proceeded to consolidate their authority. Ultimate authority lay neither within the cabinet nor even within the Unionist Party's central committee, but within an inner circle of highly placed and influential

In actuality, unbeknownst to the powers of the Entente, on August 2 a secret offensive-defensive alliance, directed against Russia in anticipation of an imminent intra-Balkan conflict, had already been signed between Germany and Turkey, under the aegis of Enver Bey, concomitantly Minister of War and Chief of Staff of the Ottoman Empire. With the support of Talat Bey and Halil Bey, respectively Minister of the Interior and President of the Lower House of Parliament, and the reluctant cooperation of the Grand Vizier, Enver held the means to force the incumbent Turkish government into compliance with Berlin.⁵⁶

For the time being, however, after mobilizing on August 3, Turkey had been content to declare its neutrality and wait to see how the military situation would develop prior to committing its armed forces.⁵⁷ So as not to upset the delicate political balance in Constantinople, Germany hesitated to put concerted pressure on the Turks, who in any case acted as a check on the smaller Balkan states.⁵⁸ In any event, it was obvious that the conception of neutrality held by Bulgaria and the Ottoman Empire favored the cause of the Central Powers, which already were using Bulgaria as a supply line to Turkey.⁵⁹

individuals: Talat Bey, Minister of the Interior and the most powerful individual in the Empire, Halil Bey, president of the lower house of parliament, Cavid Bey, Finance Minister, Cemal Bey, Minister of the Navy, and Enver Pasha, Minister of War. While the Grand Vizier, who also held the office of Foreign Minister was not a puppet, he lacked the strong personal following associated with his colleagues. Both individual initiative and mutual intrigue flourished. F. A. K. Yasamee, "Ottoman Empire." Decisions for War 1914. (ed. Keith Wilson. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995) 230-232.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 237.; Sir Louis Mallet to Sir Edward Grey; 1914 09 16 and 1914 09 20. Stevenson, 80, 88.

⁵⁷ Under the terms of the alliance, Turkey and Germany were to maintain strict neutrality in the newly-opened hostilities between Austria and Serbia. Should, however, Russia enter the war, thereby occasioning German intervention, Turkey was to follow suit. Ultimately, a revised and more comprehensive treaty was drawn up and signed in early 1915. Zeman, 59, 64.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 57

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 75.

At the end of August the military situation of the Entente was precarious as well. On the western front, Belgium had been overrun by Germany and the French army was in full retreat, while in the east the initially promising Russian invasion of Eastern Prussia had culminated in disaster at Tannenberg. Although Serbia had repulsed the first Austro-Hungarian invasion and the Russians were routing the Austrians at Lemberg it seemed only a matter of time until German reinforcements would arrive from the west. Moreover, until early 1915, almost all the news in the Bulgarian press from the eastern front would originate from Austrian or German sources.⁶⁰

On September 1, Bax-Ironside reported that Bulgaria was likely to join the Central Powers at any moment, and that only a guarantee of "compensation ... to Bulgaria by her neighbours who may gain territory elsewhere" might forestall action on the part of the Bulgarians.⁶¹ The Entente reacted only with a weak statement by the three Allied ministers in Sofia to the effect that their respective governments had

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 77.: Sir Henry Bax-Ironside to Sir Edward Grey; 1914 09 01. Stevenson, 49.

⁶¹ Sir Henry Bax-Ironside to Sir Edward Grey; 1914 09 01. Stevenson, 58. Five days later, however, Bax-Ironside reported that "Rumoured preparations against Servia and Greece are exaggerated, and we may, at any rate, count upon Bulgaria remaining quiet until Turkish policy is decided upon." Sir Henry Bax-Ironside to Sir Edward Grey; 1914 09 06. Stevenson 70.

suggested to Serbia and Greece to discuss with Bulgarian Government questions of redistribution of territories if Bulgaria engages to range herself on the side of Greece and Serbia.⁶²

For obvious reasons, this failed to register in Sofia. From the perspective of Noel Buxton and his like-minded colleagues in London, the diplomacy of the Entente in the Balkans had been not only clumsy and indecisive, but an abject failure.

⁶² Sir Edward Grey to Sir Henry Bax-Ironside; 1914 08 28 and 1914 09 06. *Ibid.*, 51, 71.

CHAPTER II

Prominent among those in the British Cabinet who, due in part to Noel Buxton's influence, had taken issue with Sir Edward Grey's Balkan policy, were Cabinet ministers David Lloyd George (Chancellor of the Exchequer), Winston Churchill (First Lord of the Admiralty), and Charles Masterman (Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster; also in charge of propaganda operations in America). They believed that acceptance of Venizelos' offer would have shown Bulgaria and Romania that Britain was committed to the Balkans, thereby encouraging both neutrals to join Serbia against Austria-Hungary.¹ Along with Buxton, they also favored a policy of extracting by force, if necessary, the required concessions to Bulgaria from Serbia and Greece.

Since the beginning of the war, Buxton had persistently impressed his views, derived from "special sources of information regarding political factors in Bulgaria,"² upon all men of power in the British government. In the following memorandum, which he had submitted directly to Sir Edward Grey in mid August, Buxton had outlined the foundations of his alternate Balkan policy, and introduced his proposal that he be sent on a mission to Bulgaria in support of the Entente:

Assuming that H. M. Government's object is to prevent Bulgaria's adhesion to the German side, Bulgaria's particular point of view must be remembered.

(1) Her eyes are on her "lost provinces," and the breach between them and the three Powers which took them is very deep.

(2) Bulgarians are of calculating disposition. The possible gain from a victory of the Entente counts less than the present dangers in which Bulgaria stands from a Turkish attack. A guarantee against Turkey would be the chief lever to

¹ Robbins, 1971, 566.

² Noel Buxton to Sir Edward Grey (repeated to David Lloyd George), quoted in Fieldhouse, 182.

use. Bulgarian neutrality should be attainable if H. M. government can be explicit on this point, while offering further advantages in the event of success of the Entente.

(3) In regard to Bulgaria, special effort is needed, because Sir H. Bax-Ironside has been openly pro-Serb.³

(4) Bulgarians feel that what they have to offer is freedom for Serbia, Rumania, and Greece to take part in the war. It might be answered that Bulgaria is not able to fight, but it is very noticeable that in a recent debate in the Sobranje all parties spoke of fighting as probably inevitable. Bulgaria has munitions to begin a war, though probably requiring a loan.

Assuming that H. M. Government wishes to prevent the paralysation of Serbia through a Bulgarian attack, or through the passage of Turkish armies across a neutral Bulgaria, the object in view is armed Bulgarian neutrality, giving the Entente freedom from Turkish attack and from the paralysation of Bulgaria's neighbours. It is much more than pacific neutrality.

Conditions for securing armed Bulgarian neutrality are:

(1) Guarantee against Turkey.

(2) Assurance that England and France and Russia will continue to act together in this guarantee.

(3) Definite approach from England. English support or acquiescence in Russian proposals is not enough. The Bulgarian Ministry came into office as anti-Russian, and could not execute a *volte-face* unless the Premier could say he had not turned pro-Russian, but was siding with England.

(4) Revision of the Bukarest [sic] Treaty frontiers in the event of victory for the Entente. This must be more or less specific.

(5) A loan.

To bring Bulgaria to the side of Greece and Serbia the fullest possible effort is needed. The events of 1913 show what is required.

The breach between the Balkan States was always deep. The League of 1912 was regarded as a miracle. The second war (which destroyed the League) is only remediable by the intervention of an outside Power with immense influence, at the moment of great need of assistance, and with definite offers of help.

A strong lead in 1913 might have avoided the second war. Russia was inadequate because suspected. An English proposal for compromise might succeed now. A special mission, or very definite proposals, might equally succeed.

³ Although Buxton was exaggerating, Crampton, 444 comments that the Bax-Ironside did suffer from a lack of conviction in the Entente efforts to woo Bulgaria. Ilcev, 44 reports that it was the general conviction that Bax-Ironside was unable to cope with his task, that compelled Grey to replace him on July 7, 1915 According to Robbins, 1971, 579 his departure was widely interpreted in Sofia as tardy proof of British determination to redress the grievances between the Entente and Bulgaria.

Even if our Ministers in the Balkans would think it irregular for a special commissioner to be sent, the object in view is paramount. Punctilio should not interfere with the possible acquisition of new forces on the side of the Entente Powers, turning the balance in their favour. An active policy, may, as it were, count on a division involving a difference of fully a million men, i. e., when the Austrian troops at present set free are reckoned.⁴

The "special commissioner" Buxton had in mind was, of course, himself. However, Grey, naturally reluctant to depart from his accustomed diplomatic procedures, and long resentful of Buxton's meddling, was unimpressed. Neither he nor Asquith thought it wise to risk compromising relations with Greece and Serbia.⁵ Furthermore, it was generally assumed in the Foreign Office that diplomacy in war would achieve nothing unless it was supported by favorable military action.⁶ Foreign policy would therefore be determined not by long-term political considerations but by immediate strategic necessity.

Nevertheless, in late August, while on his honeymoon in Scotland with the former Lucy Pelham Burn, Buxton received a wire from Masterman to the effect that the Cabinet had decided to act upon the memorandum after all. Buxton emphasized that, according to the telegram, Grey was "included in cabinet, assenting."⁷ Buxton therefore "raced back" from Scotland, and met several times with Lloyd George, accompanied by his brother and

⁴ Noel Buxton's memorandum to Sir Edward Grey; August 1914; copy. N. B. P.: Box 59; File 3.

⁵ Keith G. Robbins, "Foreign Policy, Government Structure and Public Opinion." (Hinsley 532-546) 539.

⁶ Calder attributes the unwillingness of the British Foreign Office to accept a dominant role in the making of policy, and its willingness to submerge political considerations for the sake of strategy, to what he terms its "disintegration" during the first year of the war; the transfer of Eyre Crowe to the contraband department, the replacement of Sir William Tyrrell, Grey's private secretary, by Eric Drummond, the apparent inability of both Sir Arthur Nicolson and Grey to adjust to the war and its effects on the conduct of foreign policy, etc.. Calder, 29.

⁷ Noel Buxton's autobiography draft; n. d.; copy. N. B. P.: Box 64; File 1. More complete and polished versions can be found in Box 12; File 1, and also Box 9.

partner in many Balkan ventures, Charles Roden Buxton. At length, Lloyd George provided Noel Buxton with the following note, dated August 22:

Any Balkan state that decides to throw in its lot with the Triple Entente in this struggle may depend upon the support of British Credit in raising the necessary funds to equip and maintain its army. I authorize you to make such arrangements on my behalf as you may deem desirable to guarantee British financial assistance under these conditions.⁸

In effect, the British Chancellor of the Exchequer was allowing him to pledge the Treasury to loans of any extent to Bulgaria. According to Buxton, "It sounded informal, but it was essentially sound, because Ferdinand wanted money for himself and we might have literally bought Bulgarian aid."⁹

Shortly afterwards however, Buxton received a fairly discouraging letter from Churchill's private secretary, Edward Marsh. Buxton's annotations, written with the Lord of the Admiralty in mind, are reproduced here in italics:

Winston asks me to say that while Sir E. Grey would welcome your going out as a private individual, he cannot see his way to investing you with an official character. *How would Lloyd George's letter be acted on then?* In these circumstances Winston is sure you will not wish to start till you have seen Lloyd George again. [*Churchill*] *wants to avoid responsibility!*¹⁰

On the reverse side of the sheet, Buxton continued:

⁸ David Lloyd George to Noel Buxton; 1914 08 22; copy. N. B. P.: Box 4.

⁹ Noel Buxton's autobiography; n. d.; copy. N. B. P.: Box 12; File 1. Events would later suggest that this may well have been true. For instance, Ferdinand was thought to be susceptible to flattery, and a number of proselytizing German dignitaries were sent to his court. Conversely, the Entente made only token efforts in this regard. The Central Powers took the initiative (and the prize) in financial matters as well, with assiduous German agents working successfully to influence the Bulgarian press and gain control over the country's main economic sectors. An infamous attempt in 1915 by the Entente to buy up the entire Bulgarian grain harvest, known as the Des Closières affair, ended in a fiasco thanks to the heavy-handed incompetence of the principal conspirators. Crampton, 444.

¹⁰ Edward Marsh to Noel Buxton; 1914 08 23; holograph. N. B. P.: Box 4.

I do not think it is worthwhile seeing Lloyd George again ... Lloyd George's view was that Churchill would carry matter ... he thought Churchill agreed and that my going involved letters of some sort from Grey, perhaps embodying his (LG's) letter. This may be less than Grey means by "official character." ... It seems a pity to drop the scheme ... when the object appears attainable.¹¹

What Buxton seems quite conveniently to have ignored was that there was a subtle but significant difference between his conception of the "object" of the mission and that of the Foreign Secretary. From the perspective of the British Foreign Office, a benevolently neutral Bulgaria, which was not particularly well-disposed to the aims of Russian policy in the Balkans, probably was more desirable than the uncertain benefit which its direct participation in the hostilities might have produced.¹² Moreover, Grey undoubtedly preferred Bulgarian neutrality to the prospect of Bulgaria's joining the Entente powers without having first made peace with its neighbors.¹³ Therefore, it has been postulated that Grey recognized that the voluntary reconstitution of the 1912 Balkan alliance was unlikely, but hoped that efforts to encourage such a course of action might help to maintain the neutrality of the Balkan states until an appropriate moment arrived.¹⁴

In the first two sections of his memorandum, Buxton had chosen to "assume" that Grey wished concomitantly to "prevent Bulgaria's adhesion to the German side," and "prevent the paralysation of Serbia through a Bulgarian attack, or through the passage of Turkish armies across a neutral Bulgaria." Buxton therefore concluded, correctly, that the

¹¹ Noel Buxton notes; ca. 1914 08 24; on reverse of *Ibid.*

¹² Ilcev, 33.

¹³ Sir Edward Grey to Sir Henry Bax-Ironside; 1914 08 13 and 1914 08 21. Stevenson, 21, 39.

¹⁴ Ilcev, 33.

object of the Foreign Office was "armed Bulgarian neutrality". Conversely, in the third section of the memorandum, which unlike the first two was not eventually published by Buxton during the course of the war, it is clearly stated that the object of Buxton's proposed mission would not be that of securing "armed Bulgarian neutrality," but rather "To bring Bulgaria to the side of Greece and Serbia."

Buxton believed that his mission potentially could facilitate the rebirth of a Great Bulgaria, which would represent the culmination of the Balkan Committee's dozen-odd years of existence. As he wrote in his diary,

It is horrible to *urge a people to war*, but it would be in Bulgaria's interest to do so, this being the best (and probably the last) opportunity of recovering her rights.¹⁵

Moreover, Buxton also figured that if Bulgaria's joining the Entente could hasten "even by a week, the conclusion of the war, [it] would mean the savings of thousands of lives and of millions of pounds"¹⁶ for England. It followed that it was not only expedient, but morally justifiable to force Serbia and Greece into cooperation. Lloyd George and Churchill supported this position, and their alliance with Buxton represented a mutually beneficial partnership: The success of the mission, in Buxton's view, depended upon his being invested with official sanction, which Grey was unlikely to countenance without a fight. Buxton's powerful friends in the Cabinet, on the other hand, presumably conceived of Buxton as an instrument to put their own plans into action, since the President of the

¹⁵ Conwell-Evans, 88 (emphasis mine).

¹⁶ Noel Buxton and Charles Roden Buxton, The War and the Balkans (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1915) 92.

Balkan Committee constituted an obvious intermediary between the Entente and Bulgaria.

However, when Buxton went to see Grey upon receipt of Churchill's message, the Foreign Secretary, as Buxton had feared, "suppressed" Lloyd George's letter. Buxton was given permission to travel to Sofia, but on an unofficial basis only, and with the sole mandate of reviving dormant Anglophile sentiments amongst the Bulgarian public.¹⁷ He was to cooperate with the British legation, and communicate with Grey through it. Grey also discouraged Buxton from discussing politics any more than was absolutely necessary to gauge the general sympathies of the Bulgarian politicians, and Buxton was not under any circumstances to call for Bulgaria's entry into the war. Buxton's recollections on the subject reveal the divergence between the two men:

I told Grey that I did not believe the trick could be done without official authority, because it was a matter of territory which Bulgaria must have ... I doubted the use of going without that.¹⁸

Nonetheless, Buxton agreed to go, despite the restrictions Grey had imposed upon his activities. For whatever reason, the Foreign Secretary also decreed that the question of whether or not Buxton had official sanction, and if so, the specific nature of his mandate, was to be kept a secret within the Cabinet. In Sofia, as we shall see, Buxton would turn this last provision to his own advantage.

Churchill, meanwhile, had written to Buxton as follows on August 31:

I want you to make your friends in Greece and in Bulgaria realize the brilliant but fleeting opportunity which now presents itself, and to assure them that

¹⁷ Noel Buxton's autobiography; n. d.; copy. N. B. P.: Box 12; File 1.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

England's might and perseverance will not be withheld from any righteous effort to secure the strength and union of the Balkan peoples.¹⁹

He also authorized Buxton to publish in Sofia a statement of policy, which was subsequently vetoed by Grey as well. It read, in part:

It is of the utmost importance to the future prosperity of the Balkan states that they should act together. This is the hour when the metal can be cast into the mould. It is only by reclaiming from Austria territories which belong naturally to the Balkan races that the means can be provided to satisfy the legitimate needs and aspirations of all the Balkan states...

The creation of a Balkan Confederation comprising Bulgaria, Servia, Roumania, Montenegro, and Greece, strong enough to play an effective part in the destinies of Europe, must be the common dream of all their peoples...

By acting together in unity and good faith the Balkan States can now play a decisive part, and gain advantages which may never again be offered. By disunion they will simply condemn themselves to tear each others throats without profit or reward, and left to themselves will play an utterly futile part in the destinies of the world.²⁰

* * *

On September 1, 1914, Noel and Charles Roden Buxton left London for Bulgaria, arriving in Paris on the 2nd. From there they traveled by rail to the port of Brindisi, Italy, a journey which proved somewhat more arduous than the brothers had anticipated. Buxton, never one to underplay his own sense of the dramatic, described the situation:

The Germans were far into France. Paris was expected to fall and the British Embassy were packing up for Bordeaux. The Paris Lyons station was barricaded, in case of a sudden stampede of the frightened population to get away from the enemy. The train was so crowded that to get a rest one lay on the ground, in the corridor, taking it in turns to find space to do so. Our luggage had to provide for a possible long spell, but there was no porter to help carry it...²¹

¹⁹ Winston Churchill to Noel Buxton; 1914 08 31; copy. N. B. P.: Box 1.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Noel Buxton to Lucy Buxton; 1914 09 03; holograph. N. B. P.: Box 16.

Five days later, the brothers found themselves stranded in Brindisi, where Churchill was supposed to have arranged for a warship, the H.M.S. *Hussar*, to convey the Buxtons to Salonica. However, the ship, as it turned out, was lying off the coast, out of sight and unable to approach the harbor for fear of being interned. It was only on September 8 that the Buxtons were able to arrange to be ferried out to the waiting vessel.²² Buxton's comments to his wife on the incongruity of the situation were appropriate to the circumstances:

It is an amazing experience for a civilian to be sent on a warship for the sake of his influence as a purely private person. If the desired influence were given by making me official, it would be natural. As it is, the ship is much more flattering.²³

He continued in melodramatic fashion:

There is a poor bluejacket very ill on board, the doctor said dying unless he was landed ... [but] *our orders are to get quick to Sofia for big affairs* ... The captain scoffed at the idea of delaying for the man. Such is war...

Although Buxton's account may be exaggerated, it underscores the impression that Churchill had graced the expedition with far more importance than would seem appropriate for an ostensible "study" mission.

Buxton concluded the letter home on a portentous note:

Our wireless man catches messages passing to the French or British admirals. The last says the Turks are coming out of the Dardanelles, so we may meet the *Goeben*. If so we must fight and shall be lucky if we knock some paint off her ... before she finishes us. ... Do not be alarmed if you do not hear from me for some time.

²² For details of the journey see the various letters Noel Buxton wrote to his wife while en route: N. B. P.: Box 16; File 1a and 1b. The Buxtons were however pleasantly surprised by the warship, which they found not only larger than expected, but "made very smart for the admiralty's use" as well. Noel Buxton to Lucy Buxton; 1914 09 08; holograph. N. B. P.: Box 25; File 3.

²³ *Ibid.* This is the source for the other quotations having to do with the *Hussar*.

However, they reached Salonica on the 9th without incident, and arrived in Sofia late on the evening of the 10th. Although Noel Buxton, who spoke no Bulgarian, was not particularly well known in rural Bulgaria,²⁴ Sofia was another matter, as his brother Charles Roden explained:

His fame and popularity ... are quite impossible to imagine ... something extraordinary, in fact without parallel. I come in for a considerable share of the glory ... however, he really does deserve something of the kind for the way in which he has gone grinding away at the subject of the Balkans throughout all the years when nobody had any interest in it.²⁵

Noel Buxton himself certainly was gratified by his reception, and wrote again to his wife as follows:

Very glad we came, much to do here. Great relief to find that we are not too late after getting alarming reports en route. I wish I could give you news but only open writing will reach you ... It seems unlikely that we shall be free to return for some time.²⁶

Nonetheless, how the brothers were to proceed in Sofia was a problem. First of all, the British Minister, Bax-Ironside, regarded their arrival as an intrusion. He wired immediately to Grey, demanding to know whether Noel Buxton was to be regarded as a special envoy of the government. The Foreign Secretary apparently declined to answer

²⁴ J. Swire, Bulgarian Conspiracy. (London: Robert Hale Ltd., 1939) 29. This was in contrast to, for example, Buxton's close friend James D. Bouchier, permanent Balkan correspondent of the *Times*, who had actually been featured on a Bulgarian postage stamp, and Balkan Committee member and renowned anthropologist Edith Durham, who was embraced by the Albanian peasantry during her many years of residence in that country. Buxton's valiant efforts to organize relief expeditions to Macedonia notwithstanding, there was probably not much to interest the peasants in the rhetoric of a far-off politician.

²⁵ Charles Roden Buxton to Lucy Buxton; 1914 11 01; holograph. N. B. P.: Box 25; File 3.

²⁶ Noel Buxton to Lucy Buxton; holograph; 1914 09 11. N. B. P.: Box 16. It would appear as though the Buxtons had originally planned only for a week-long stay in Sofia: *Dnevnik*; 1914 09 14. N. B. P.: Box 59; File 3.

the question directly, although he subsequently instructed him to pay for and send whatever messages Buxton wished to the Cabinet.²⁷ According to Buxton, Bax-Ironside relieved his feelings by "denouncing Bulgaria when we were dining with him, enabling the servants to make known that he alluded to Bulgarians in general as 'those savages.'"²⁸ The Buxtons believed, however, that if their Minister could not be co-opted into their plans, his opposition could at least be circumvented.

The Buxtons also soon found themselves embroiled in a rather delicate diplomatic situation. As the Buxtons seem to have anticipated,²⁹ there was authoritative speculation throughout the Balkans that Noel Buxton had come as a direct emissary of the British government. Their exclusive passage aboard the *Hussar* was cited in support of this view.³⁰ This misapprehension gained further credence by virtue of Buxton's own halfhearted denials as well as the silence of the British Foreign Office. Although Buxton

²⁷ Noel Buxton's notes; n. d.; holograph. N. B. P.: Box 64. File 1.

²⁸ Noel Buxton's autobiography; n. d.; copy. N. B. P.: Box 12; File 1. Bax-Ironside, was characterized by Buxton's friend J. D. Bouchier as "one of the only living Englishmen who had been living in Bulgaria for several years, not to have liked and appreciated the Bulgarians." Noel Buxton's notes; n. d.; holograph. N. B. P.: Box 64. File 1.

²⁹ According to Buxton, the "*Hussar* ... was a great success." Noel Buxton to Lucy Buxton; 1914 09 20; holograph. N. B. P.: Box 16. Interestingly, Buxton continued, "...No need to conceal the fact now," leaving one to wonder if he had been asked to do so. Perhaps it had something to do with the tension between Churchill and Grey. Churchill may also have wished simply to indulge in a little gunboat diplomacy.

³⁰ For instance, *Dnevnik*, an independent Sofia newspaper, asserted that "The mission of Messrs. Buxton is to a certain degree confidential. It is worthy of note that they were able to reach Salonica through their passage aboard the S. S. *Hussar*." *Dnevnik*; 1914 09 14. N. B. P.: Box 59; File 3. In this thesis, all quotations from Bulgarian newspapers, except when specified otherwise, are taken from English translations which were provided for the Buxtons on a daily basis by one Christos Stamatov. These translations occasionally are complemented in the Buxton Papers by alternate translations of the same articles which appeared in the London press at a much later date, as well as by overlapping articles in *Echo de Bulgarie*. A comparison reveals that Stamatov's handwritten versions, although clumsy, are generally accurate. There is a handwritten list, in French, of the major Bulgarian political parties, and of the newspapers associated with them. N. B. P.: Box 64; File 1.

was warned by the police not to make any political statements, the fact that he was firmly committed to Bulgaria's joining the Entente was common currency within Bulgarian political circles. Buxton himself commented that "everyone knew what I stood for; on the other hand they could not estimate quite how far I represented the British Government."³¹ Under the circumstances, Grey could not have failed to anticipate that Buxton's oft-expressed personal views would naturally be attributed to the British Government itself.

It would also appear as though Buxton was unable to restrain himself during the course of a newspaper interview which was published only a day or two after his arrival. Adroitly sidestepping the inevitable question regarding the nature of his "special mission," Buxton inquired of his interviewer the latter's opinion on Bulgaria's likely role in the War. The journalist responded that Bulgaria cherished a policy of strict neutrality. However, when the Bulgarian went on to stress that his country would "pursue her national interests," Buxton interrupted him:

Yes that is the point. ... [but] tell me, then who you think most easily ... could avenge the loss of Macedonia? ... England, only England. Only she will help you to get Macedonia ... make your relations with England more friendly! Deeds are necessary, deeds are necessary! You ought to do something...³²

Although Buxton left the precise nature of "something" to the imagination of his counterpart, he subsequently disavowed his statements, claiming that he had been misquoted, and that in any case it was "not yet convenient to give statements for the press about the mission."³³

³¹ Noel Buxton's autobiography; n. d.; copy. N. B. P.: Box 12; File 1.

³² *Dnevnik*, ca. 1914 09 14. N. B. P.: Box 59; File 3. "Conforming with an old habit the president of the Balkan Committee began with reserve..."

³³ *Mir*, 1914 09 16. *Ibid.*

The Buxtons soon settled in at the *Hotel Bulgaria*, and appear to have passed the next few days in private discussion with Bax-Ironside, Savinsky, and the French Minister in Sofia. Buxton claimed, with some justification,³⁴ that the latter pair had "sent home very sound opinions"³⁵ following their discussions. Buxton subsequently concentrated his attention on various Bulgarian politicians. These included the National Liberal leader Nikola Genadiev,³⁶ the Young Liberal leader and government minister of finance Dimitur Toncev, and of course Radoslavov himself. In conversation with them, Buxton adhered to Grey's guidelines, while Radoslavov reiterated his usual assurances about his determination to maintain strict neutrality.³⁷ Radoslavov also promised to arrange an audience with King Ferdinand.³⁸

Buxton was more interested in the leaders of the Opposition, however, for, like many of his London colleagues, he overrated their strength and militancy, and hence their ability to influence the ruling Government.³⁹ Therefore, in front of Ivan Gesov,⁴⁰

³⁴ Buxton apparently based this assertion on archival material subsequently published by the Soviet government, although he failed to cite any source. However, the Buxton Files do contain reprints of telegrams exchanged between A. P. Izvolski, the former Tsarist ambassador to Paris, and Sazonov, following a meeting between Izvolski and Buxton in late 1914, which do support Buxton's views. N. B. P.: Box 64; File 1.

³⁵ Noel Buxton's autobiography; n. d.; copy. N. B. P.: Box 12; File 1.

³⁶ Genadiev, believed at the beginning of the War to be the second most influential politician in the Liberal bloc (behind Radoslavov), was also a character of particularly ill repute. The leader of the National Liberal (or Stambulovist) party, he had been Radoslavov's choice for Minister of Foreign Affairs in the July 1913 government. Although his newspaper, *Volia*, was subsidized by the Austrian Legation in Sofia, he soon split ranks with Radoslavov, and in 1915 was assiduously courted by the Entente. However, a number of previous transgressions, not to mention his apparent complicity in a terrorist bombing in Sofia in early 1915, weakened his position vis a vis his former allies.

³⁷ Ilcev, 35.

³⁸ Noel Buxton to Sir Edward Grey; 1914 09 17; copy. N. B. P.: Box 59; File 3.

³⁹ Ilcev, 39.

Alexander Stamboliski,⁴¹ Stojan Danev,⁴² Alexander Malinov,⁴³ and others, Buxton misrepresented Grey's position and cautiously hinted that Great Britain favored a more active Bulgarian policy.⁴⁴ However, while it is not impossible that there might have been political forces in Bulgaria capable of perhaps curtailing the Government's freedom of action had they received sustained support from abroad,⁴⁵ there was certainly no

⁴⁰ Ivan Evstratiev Gesov (1849-1924), whose family owned textile mills in both England and Bulgaria, completed his education at the University of London, and was jailed as a subversive upon his return to Bulgaria. He was subsequently rehabilitated as a political moderate, and became Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs from 1911 to 1913. An author and playwright, Gesov was also a patron of the arts and cultural activist, and was named president of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences in 1912. Although his political star faded somewhat thereafter, he remained an outspoken leader in the Opposition and appears to have been Buxton's main political confidant in Bulgaria. See letters from Ivan Gesov to Noel Buxton; 1915 08 20; holograph. N. B. P.: Box 56a; File 1: 1915 02 27; holograph: Box 57; File 8: 1915 06 15; holograph: Box 69; File 3.

⁴¹ Stamboliski (1879-1923) was the leader of the Bulgarian Agrarian People's Union, which espoused a somewhat modified form of Bolshevism. An extreme Russophile, he was imprisoned for threatening the life of Ferdinand following the Bulgarian decision to side with the Central Powers in December 1915. Released in September 1918, it was hoped that he would defuse an incipient revolt of demoralized Bulgarian soldiers who had been organized into detachments under the aegis of an Agrarian faction. Instead, he betrayed his erstwhile jailers, fled into hiding when the revolt was suppressed, and was finally invested with the Premiership by Ferdinand's son and successor, Tsar Boris III, in October, 1919. Stamboliski soon demonstrated increasingly authoritarian tendencies, and was murdered on June 9, 1923, during a military coup.

⁴² Also a Russophile, Danev had played an active part in Bulgarian politics since the late 1890s, and had participated in Gesov's cabinet as Minister for Foreign Affairs prior to succeeding him in early in 1913 as prime minister as well. Danev himself was ousted in favor of Radoslavov in July of that same year, but remained at the head of the Progress Liberal Party.

⁴³ Malinov was the leader of the Democratic party and had been Premier from 1908 until his replacement by Gesov in 1911. A staunch nationalist, especially with regard to Macedonia, he too was a Russophile and hence friendly to the Entente. On June 21, 1918, he succeeded Radoslavov, as Noel Buxton had predicted back in November 1914. Of course, Buxton had anticipated a much more accelerated transfer of power. Noel Buxton to Sir Edward Grey; 1914 11 17; copy. N. B. P.: Box 59; File 3.

⁴⁴ Ilcev, 35.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 48.

dominant figure or sufficiently united group which might have been able to engineer an actual coup against the interests of the Dual Alliance.⁴⁶

Similarly, Buxton also appears to have been subject to the misconception that public opinion in Bulgaria was as politically effective as it was in Britain, although any hopes he might have entertained of mobilizing the peasants to the cause of the Entente were soon dashed. Shortly after his arrival, he received a letter from one Edward Haskell, of the American Mission in Phillipopolis, whose opinion Buxton seems to have held in high regard. Haskell asserted that "the thought of 'the man on the street,' the common people" was rather with the Dual Alliance than the Entente, thereby, according to Noel Buxton's annotation, "showing the difficulty of our mission."⁴⁷ Haskell pointed out that the position of Austria with respect to Serbia was analogous to that of Russia vis à vis Bulgaria. A victorious Triple Alliance could elevate Bulgaria to a position of dominance over the Balkan peninsula, whereas in the event of an Entente victory, Serbia, Greece, and Rumania would be in position to insist on the maintenance of the Bucharest treaty. British ideals would be then swept aside for, in the eyes of many Bulgarians, "Russia is without conscience, ruthless and brutal."⁴⁸ Haskell did conclude his report on a more positive note:

A dismembered Austria removes the one great Bulgarian defense against Russia - unless England will definitely and irrevocably pledge herself to

⁴⁶ Crampton, 445.; Ilcev, 48.

⁴⁷ Noel Buxton's annotation on Edward B. Haskell to Noel Buxton; 1914 09 16; holograph. N. B. P.: Box 57; File 5.

⁴⁸ Edward B. Haskell to Noel Buxton; 1914 09 16; holograph. *Ibid.*

maintain Bulgaria's integrity and cause. If she does this in writing she doubtless will get the favour of Bulgaria.⁴⁹

Noel Buxton had already drawn similar conclusions, believing that the logic of the situation left no other alternative. As early as September 14th, Gesov asserted in *Utro*, an independent paper, that the "noble Englishman brings something for Macedonia and Dobruja."⁵⁰

In general, however, Buxton was too experienced a politician to be pinned him down on specifics, unless he himself was so inclined. Charles Roden gave some account of his brother's methods:

He is fertile in ideas and of course beats all the professional diplomatists hollow ... his diplomacy is never to answer anyone's questions directly, and if he does not want to answer at all to pretend not to understand the question. At such moments his French, which is otherwise tolerable, becomes extremely bad, and can be made when he chooses, totally unintelligible.⁵¹

Intelligible or otherwise, the succession of interviews continued unabated. In his diary, Noel Buxton wrote that

callers generally arrived before we finished dressing, clamoring at the door of our room as is the custom of Balkan lands, and the day ended in long after-dinner conversations.⁵²

Although many such meetings must naturally have escaped the attention or interest of media commentators, a fair number did receive some mention either in the press or, on

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* At this stage, the idea of a separate peace with Austria-Hungary was still favored in London. See Calder, 93ff.

⁵⁰ *Utro*; 1914 09 14. N. B. P.: Box 59; File 3.

⁵¹ Charles Roden Buxton to Lucy Buxton; 1914 11 01; holograph. N. B. P.: Box 25; File 3.

⁵² Conwell-Evans, 91.

occasion, in Noel Buxton's notes. For instance, on the 15th, the Buxtons reportedly met with the leaders of the Radical party⁵³ and with Stamboliski of the Agrarian party as well,⁵⁴ prior to an extended after-dinner conversation with Radoslavov. The Buxtons were apparently pleased with their reception at the hands of the Prime Minister.⁵⁵

A meeting between Buxton and a three-member delegation from an organization called the Bulgarian National League⁵⁶ was also widely reported. The delegates were said to have expressed their gratitude for past British efforts on behalf of Bulgaria, but also alluded to "deep wounds ... inflicted to Bulgaria by some friends of Britain."⁵⁷ In response, Buxton rather presumptuously reassured his interlocutors that Sir Edward Grey would never forget Bulgarian aspirations.⁵⁸ Of course, the delegates were not so naive as to assume that Britain would redress Bulgaria's territorial grievances without expecting something tangible in return. *Narodni Prava*, the official Liberal party organ, therefore countered Buxton's statement with the assertion that

no Bulgarian can find in himself the strength to help neighbors who ruined him ... our nation is tired from the past wars and is satisfied with the declared neutrality of the government.⁵⁹

⁵³ N. Tzanov and L. Gheorgov. *Dnevnik*; 1914 09 16. N. B. P.: Box 59; File 3.

⁵⁴ *Utro*; 1914 09 16. *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Mir*; 1914 09 16. *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ In response to Noel Buxton's inquiry, the delegates asserted that the League was not affiliated with any political party, but was simply a cultural organization, which promoted the development of a national Bulgarian consciousness.

⁵⁷ Viz. Serbia and Greece. *Narodni Prava*; 1914 09 15. N. B. P.: Box 59; File 3.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* In actuality, Grey and his F. O. colleagues, exasperated by the incessant lobbying of the Balkan Committee, apparently had obtained a perverse sense of satisfaction over the Bulgarian disaster in the Second Balkan War. Robbins, 1977, "Public..." 86.

⁵⁹ *Narodni Prava*; 1914 09 15. N. B. P.: Box 59; File 3.

The newspaper also took care to mention that the delegates from the National League, representative of the country as a whole by inference of the fact that "they were not representatives of political parties," supported the Government position.⁶⁰ Similarly, *Kambana*, a semi-official Austrophile publication, declared that "whatever negotiations may be started with the representatives of the Entente the result for the present will be a failure," given the obvious commitment to Serbia on the part of the Entente.⁶¹ However, the hope was also expressed that

the excellent reception and the sincere sympathy towards the fatherland of Gladstone which the exalted guests [i. e. the Buxtons] are receiving at Sofia have convinced them that Bulgaria ... does not foster any inimical feelings towards Great Britain nor considers that Bulgarian interests will ever come into conflict with British interests.⁶²

According to a newspaper article of September 16, the aged Bulgarian Exarch Josef also spoke out against Noel Buxton's policies. Although the exarch professed to believe that through Buxton "Bulgaria in a short time will realize all her ideals," he reportedly continued as follows:

It is ridiculous to speak for Serbo-Bulgarian friendship ... England is a preeminently realistic state, but gives birth also to great romantics, among whom is Noel Buxton ... [who] will acknowledge that it is impossible for Bulgaria to sacrifice not a single soldier in help of Servia, who at the moment when her life is hanging on the thread again continues exterminating the Bulgarian population in Macedonia ... [nonetheless] we are hoping that we shall find the sympathy of Great Britain ... our policy is not contrary to British interests in the east.⁶³

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Kambana*; 1914 09 16. N. B. P.: Box 59; File 3.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ n. p.; 1914 09 16. N. B. P.: Box 59; File 3. Stamatov did not specify which newspaper ran the story, although it was definitely not *Narodni Prava*.

It is interesting to note the overall similarity between the exarch's remarks and those previously expressed in *Narodni Prava* and *Kambana*, especially as the former journal in five days' time was belatedly "authorized to communicate that at no time ... did His Beatitude say that which was attributed to him in the press."⁶⁴ It is not implausible that the belated retraction was politically motivated, bearing in mind that exarch was a powerful presence in Bulgaria. Radoslavov and Ferdinand still desired at this stage to keep their options open, and may have deemed impolitic the albeit popular stance attributed to Josef.

In any event, the original "Exarch and Mr. Buxton" article was also notable as one of the first in Sofia to refer to unproven allegations in the Greek press that Buxton, contrary to appearances, was operating only on an unofficial basis as a representative of the Balkan Committee. The Greek claims, as well as similar accounts which soon materialized in Austrian and Turkish newspapers as well, were generally dismissed in Bulgaria, where it was assumed that they were based on political prejudice rather than on fact.⁶⁵ Even *Kambana* specified on the 16th that the Buxtons were on "a mission from the ... English government itself." In a not unrelated assertion, the newspaper also reported that Noel Buxton had explicitly confirmed "that Great Britain supports the idea of a Great Bulgaria."⁶⁶

⁶⁴ *Narodni Prava*; 1914 09 21. *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Not altogether unlikely, as the British Cabinet seems to have kept the secret until September 24. *infra*, 55.

⁶⁶ *Kambana*; 1914 09 16. N. B. P.: *Ibid.*

After spending the afternoon of September 16 with the leaders of the Narrow and Broad Social Democratic parties,⁶⁷ the Buxtons were received in the evening by King Ferdinand, who had hitherto refused to see any representative of the Entente. Although the forty-five minute audience may only have been intended as an act of courtesy towards the president of the Balkan Committee, Charles Roden Buxton recalled that his brother still tried to profit from the opportunity:

With the wily old king of Bulgaria, who refused to ask questions and would only listen, his [Buxton's] powers were put to a stiff test. He had to deliver a long speech, the monarch nodding at intervals deferentially. He managed to convey several disagreeable [notions] ... such as the reputation lost in England by Bulgaria's beginning the second war.⁶⁸

This was presumably intended as a warning to Ferdinand that British support for Bulgarian aspirations was no longer inalienable. In his diary, Noel Buxton himself pronounced similarly upon the affair:

[Ferdinand] managed to hold his tongue but to seem very eager ... asked about the position of the King of Italy and Roumania. He would express no opinion except in favour of neutrality. He said 'J'écoute, mais je ne réponds pas. Nous devons rester comme dans un petit cocon.' His position of sitting on the fence waiting for the highest bidder could not have been more neatly or cynically expressed.⁶⁹

Although Ferdinand's performance was prototypical of wartime diplomacy, his reticence might also be interpreted as a question of protocol. Noel Buxton, after all, could hardly have misrepresented himself to the King as an official emissary, had Ferdinand cared to inquire about his status. Of course, Buxton, as alluded to above, was operating under the

⁶⁷ *Narodni Prava*; 1914 09 16. N. B. P.: *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ Charles Roden Buxton to Lucy Buxton; 1914 11 01; holograph. N. B. P.: Box 35; File 3.

⁶⁹ Conwell-Evans, 92.

misguided assumption that in any case the Bulgarian Opposition ministers could, in conjunction with an aroused populace, override Ferdinand's pro-German inclinations.

On the 17th of September, Buxton wired an "Outline of Scheme" to Grey. He deferentially devoted most of the text to an analysis of the state of public opinion in Sofia, based on the views of his "many friends, official and unofficial among various political parties." He reported that, unlike France and Russia, Britain had not been totally discredited by its passive acceptance of Serbia's refusal in 1913 to honor its prior agreement with Bulgaria apropos of Macedonia. Nonetheless, Britain was considered unlikely to influence a final postwar settlement, and Buxton advised Grey at least to endorse a conditional offer regarding the return of Dobruja, and furnish Bulgaria with a loan.⁷⁰ This, he suggested, was the minimum required to

justify change of front by Radoslavoff, or to facilitate reconstruction of Cabinet on lines favourable to the Entente ... British activity on above lines would turn opinion towards policy nominally neutral but benevolent towards Entente by which Bulgaria would relieve Servia, Greece and Roumania from fear of attack and would hold frontier against Turkey, thus greatly increasing military difficulties of Austria.⁷¹

The wire was in effect little more than an abbreviated version of the first two sections of Buxton's August memorandum, despite the passage of one month's time and seven days of intense and intimate conferring in the Bulgarian capital itself. Of course,

⁷⁰ Back on September 14, Grey had communicated the following to Radoslavov: "His Majesty's Government might be prepared to consider sympathetically question of a loan if approached by Bulgarian Government. An essential condition would, of course, be definite assurance of Bulgarian neutrality, and we could in any case give no promise beforehand either that the loan could be raised in present circumstances or that the London market can absorb it alone." Sir Edward Grey to Sir Henry Bax Ironside; 1914 09 14. Stevenson, 80. The wording of the note was hardly calculated to inspire confidence however.

⁷¹ Noel Buxton to Sir Edward Grey; 1914 09 17; copy. N. B. P.: Box 59; File 3.

bearing in mind that Ferdinand and Radoslavov had been buying time through their affirmations of "strict neutrality," it is conceivable that the political situation in Bulgaria simply had not changed significantly over the period. Turkey was not yet openly committed to the Central Powers, and the eastern and western military fronts had stabilized.⁷² The average Bulgarian, the general outrage over persistent reports of alleged Serbian and Greek atrocities in Macedonia notwithstanding, was in no hurry for war thanks to the previous years' slaughter.

Moreover, Buxton's "scheme" could of course be trumped at any time by an offer from the Central Powers, which had the luxury of bargaining with what was from their standpoint enemy territory.⁷³ Perhaps the derivative nature of Buxton's first wire to Grey constituted a tacit admission of his failure so far to produce anything new or concrete that might justify a change of policy on the part of Grey and the Foreign Office. The Foreign Secretary, of course, was resigned to Serbian and Greek intransigence, and believed correctly that the loci of political power in Bulgaria lay with the uncooperative Ferdinand and Radoslavov. He certainly did not share Buxton's conviction that the supposed will of the people would prevail.

⁷² The German drive to overwhelm France had finally been checked at the September 6-10 Battle of the Marne, when they were forced into retreat by an Allied counterattack. By September 14, however, the Germans had established lines of defense along the Aisne river which would remain relatively stable for the duration of the conflict. Meanwhile, the Russians had consolidated their victory over Austria-Hungary at Lemberg, and were continuing through Galicia towards Cracow. To the north, although a small but effective German force was threatening to advance on Warsaw, it amounted to little more than a diversionary raid.

⁷³ Viz. all of Macedonia and Thrace, and dominance over the Balkans thanks to the destruction of Serbia and reduction of Greece.

By this time, Noel Buxton had also realized that his own personal popularity in Sofia would not necessarily translate into support for his cause. For instance, he and his brother were receiving numerous flattering messages from the representatives of various Bulgarian national or political organizations. One such telegram began:

The whole of Bulgaria, always unanimous in strong sentiments of sincere respect for the fatherland of the great Gladstone, and towards her great cultural ideals, is filled with joy on the occasion of your significant visit during these critical days of the great European conflagration..."⁷⁴

Above the text, Noel Buxton wrote: "A sample of our welcome. The press is crammed with articles in same train but often against our policy." Nonetheless, his belief in the willingness and ability of the Opposition ministers and general public to pressure their Government into an alliance with the Triple Entente remained unshaken. Of course, Buxton's optimism depended, in his view, upon his advice being heeded in London.

One of the inherent weaknesses of Grey's position on Macedonia was in fact exposed two days later. During the course of an interview with *Utro*, Buxton maintained Grey's line and stated that Macedonia could only be returned to Bulgaria after the War. The Bulgarian journalist's response was revealing:

We hear also that the dual alliance have also promised to give it to us after the end of the war. Since the Triple Entente and the Dual Alliance are giving to us Macedonia all after the end of the war, isn't it better even now to occupy it, and to enjoy it at least in these troubled times, and after the end of the war, you may decide to whom you shall give it?

⁷⁴ Leading Citizens of Phillipopolis to Noel Buxton; 1914 09 22; copy. *Ibid.* Most such telegrams had to do with the situation in Macedonia or Dobrodja, or, as was the case in this instance, expressed the senders' gratitude for Noel Buxton's work in the Balkan Committee.

Although Buxton wisely declined to answer, it supposedly was understood that "he shared the rightness of the Macedonian demand."⁷⁵

The Buxtons persevered in their efforts, visiting on September 17 the country town of Kostenets-Banya. From there they proceeded to another village, Tchan Kourya, before returning to the capital on the 18th.⁷⁶ On the morning of the next day they met with the president of the Dobruja Society, K. Spesarevsky, who expressed his hope that Noel Buxton would be "an arbiter and protector of the weak and persecuted, who the Kingdom of Bulgaria is unable to help."⁷⁷ According to *Dnevnik*, an independant paper, Noel Buxton "manifested a great interest towards the cause of the Dobrodja," and promised "to work for the rights of the Dobrodja people."⁷⁸ However, Spesarevsky later claimed that Buxton had dismissed him with the remark that "At the post-war peace conference the Dobrodja question will be considered as well, but try to come to an understanding with the Romanians even now."⁷⁹

⁷⁵ *Utro*; 1914 09 19. *Ibid.* One Robert Thonesou, a British missionary, writing to Noel Buxton at a slightly later date on behalf of the inhabitants of the town of Samokov, echoed that view: "The one condition that seems to hold out any hope of the acceptance of your proposals by Bulgarians ... is the following: - The Alliance, if successful, will certainly deprive Servia of Macedonia, and give that to Bulgaria. The Entente provides much the same should it be victorious; for Servia would then acquire Bosnia and Hercegovina ... In that case, let the Entente now say to Bulgaria - 'enter at once and take possession: we shall see to it that neither Servia nor Greece opposes you.' With that tangible proof that the Entente's promise was genuine, Bulgaria would gladly cast in her lot with the Entente." Robert Thonesou to Noel Buxton; 1914 09 29; holograph. N. B. P.: Box 57; File 5.

⁷⁶ There does not seem to be any record of the reception the Buxtons received at the hands of the townspeople.

⁷⁷ Dobrodja Association to Noel Buxton; 1914 09 21; copy. N. B. P.: Box 59; File 3.

⁷⁸ *Dnevnik*; 1914 09 20. *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Utro*; 1914 09 27. *Ibid.*

On the evening of September 19, the Bulgarian English Speaking League hosted a reception and banquet in honor of the Buxton brothers. In attendance were at least nine former or current government ministers, the president of Bulgaria's Supreme Court, the country's Attorney General, the mayor of Sofia and his two immediate predecessors, the United States' Military Attaché, and many other figures of importance.⁸⁰ Tickets for the affair, advertised in the press as a "public lecture ... about the relations between England and Bulgaria," had also been available to the general public at least five days in advance.⁸¹

Noel Buxton introduced his first formal statement of policy in Bulgaria by acknowledging the favorable reception he and his brother had received in the press, and remarked that his countrymen were in general sympathetic to the Macedonian cause. However, Buxton had "not come to Sofia amidst this enormous international crisis for the exchange of compliments," and so proceeded to broach the topic of his mission:

It was very hard for me to leave my home just now, when England is waging a fateful war and [my] being very busy there. Very influential men in London asked me to come, and from the very fact that I came you can judge what a great interest there is in England for the standpoint of Bulgaria. I am pleased with my coming to express to you the English sympathy, because, as a friend of Bulgaria, I think that during this crisis she ought to look on England.⁸²

In tacit acknowledgment of the fact that Ferdinand and Radoslavov were unlikely to heed his advice, Buxton immediately reminded his audience that "Englishmen are interested in

⁸⁰ *Mir*; 1914 09 20. *Ibid.* The names of the individuals in question are also provided.

⁸¹ *Dnevnik*; 1914 09 15. *Ibid.*

⁸² *Utro*; 1914 09 20. *Ibid.* Again, Buxton's apparently awkward manner of speaking can presumably be attributed to the fact that his speech was translated into Bulgarian by the newspapers, and than back again into English by Stamatov.

you principally because they believe in government which is based on the will of the governed." Again, this might be taken to imply that the incumbent Bulgarian government was unrepresentative, and that the Bulgarian people should rally around the Opposition parties and carry the day.

Buxton continued as follows:

...in the present Great War, especially, they [Englishmen] are striving for the rights of the small nations ... For the future they wish a settlement which should be a permanent guaranty for peace; therefore they wish frontiers which are solidly national, so that there should not be ground for future war. In addition to that they wish that the Balkan nations should confederate. ... If the Balkan nations were to spread up to their true ethnographic boundaries, they could live in peace and prosperity.

As he approached the concluding phase of his lecture, the tenor of Buxton's oration became rather more ominous. He warned his audience that, in fact, the Bulgarian question actually did not rank high on the agenda of most politicians, and explained that reservations regarding Bulgaria's attitude were growing even within the ranks of the foremost British Bulgarophiles. According to Buxton, Bulgarians failed to recognize the inevitability of an Entente victory, and he emphasized "the invincible determination of Great Britain to employ its endless resources of men and ensure the victory." Furthermore, a victorious Entente, unlike the Central Powers, would provide for the equitable delineation of the Balkan states. British support for Bulgarian claims would depend however on the attitude of Bulgaria during the war:

Englishmen will reward those Balkan states which have been well-disposed towards them. I hope ... that you will support the English cause, so that the decisive British influence at the ... coming [peace] congress should be in support of the Bulgarian cause. ... you must create a better and more favourable impression in England. The present one must be substituted. Concerning the ways, everyone will guess them. I don't wish to meddle in the

Bulgarian policy ... I ask you only to secure your right to demand that England support the Bulgarian rights when the time comes...

Although it is difficult to distinguish points of substance from rhetoric in Buxton's speech, Buxton certainly seemed to have violated Grey's guidelines, not to mention his prohibition against political agitation in Bulgaria as well. This was certainly the view of the Constantinople journal *Tasfiri-Efkia*, which asserted that in allowing Buxton "to arrange at the capital a meeting against the policy of the cabinet," Ferdinand and Radoslavov were presumably paving the way for a change of policy. The editor of Sofia's *Volga* rebutted in a tactful manner:

Mr. Buxton did not arrange a meeting in Sofia but an intimate conference in which he spoke very little about policy. ... when the government, trusting the patriotism of the Bulgarian opposition, is not taking measures for its persecution, let this not be considered as a transitory means towards a new course of its policy.⁸³

Nonetheless, *Kambana* summarized "the proposition with which he [Buxton] had come from England" as an injunction to "Hold yourselves with the Entente."⁸⁴ However, according to the Bulgarian National Committee, "the bloodshed, the exterminations, the violence and the atrocities" in Macedonia could be stopped only through its immediate occupation. Should England cooperate, Bulgaria and the Entente would be "inseparable ... Should she refuse ... all the promises and flattery are in vain."⁸⁵

⁸³ *Volga*; 1914 10 01. *Ibid.* The editor's use of the term "intimate" is inexplicable however.

⁸⁴ *Kambana*; 1914 09 20. *Ibid.* While the Serbs and Greeks often were accused of excessive loquacity, the Bulgarians were unlikely to have been impressed by excessive rhetoric. Buxton himself characterized the Bulgarians as "practical and positive ... in their manner of speaking. Unlike their neighbours, they are accustomed to use enough words to explain their meaning and no more. Buxton and Buxton, 71.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

The Committee also expressed its distress at the thought that Bulgarian loyalty seemed to be on trial, although the "Great friend of Bulgaria does not clearly say why."⁸⁶ Although Buxton had in fact left the precise nature of the required change of policy ambiguous, it could certainly be interpreted as a call at least for benevolent neutrality. After all, at the banquet which followed, Buxton expressed confidence that "Bulgaria, with her *attitude*, will enable England to stand for her just aspirations."⁸⁷ However, bearing in mind that Buxton had moments before defined a permanent settlement of the Balkan problem as one based on ethnographic frontiers, his proposed "revision" of current Bulgarian policy could also be interpreted quite sensibly as no less than a demand that Bulgaria join the War immediately.

In any case, the Buxtons apparently received congratulatory telegrams, "signed by the presidents of almost all parties,"⁸⁸ from the outlying provinces of Phillipopolis and Varna, among others. There was apparently no immediate reaction in official British or Bulgarian circles, and on the following day the Buxtons visited the mayor of Sofia, M. Todorov, who returned the favor several hours later. They also spoke at length with Gesov.⁸⁹ On September 21, Noel Buxton and Savinsky conferred for much of the morning at the Hotel Bulgaria. Prior to attending another banquet held in their honor in

⁸⁶ *Narodni Prava*; 1914 10 02. N. B. P.: Box 59; File 3.

⁸⁷ *Mir*; 1914 09 20. *Ibid.* (emphasis mine).

⁸⁸ *Mir*; 1914 09 23. *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ *L'Echo de Bulgarie*; 1914 10 22. *Ibid.*

the evening, the Buxtons attempted a visit, which they thought had been arranged beforehand, to the Holy Synod, only to find that the Exarch was absent.⁹⁰

About this time, extracts from a recent series of attacks on Noel Buxton's policies and character originally carried in the Constantinople press began to appear in Bulgarian newspapers. For instance, *Dnevnik* reported the judgement of *Ikdam* that: "Buxton's mission to Bulgaria will fail, due to the state of cold reason, so necessary to the current Balkan situation, that predominates there."⁹¹ In the same vein, *Utro* published a *Tanin* article which asserted that

So long as the efforts for the restoration of the Balkan alliance will be developed under the influence of foreign states, which want to use the Balkans for their own purposes, these efforts will prove fruitless.⁹²

With the exception of certain articles, culled from the more extreme Turkish organs, which openly incited their readers against the Buxtons, such extracts were generally reprinted in Sofia with little or no editorial comment.

On the 21st, *Dnevnik* also reported that Noel Buxton, with the explicit permission of Sir Edward Grey, had offered to the Bulgarian government compensation which violated Turkish territorial integrity.⁹³ While Buxton may well have been inclined to do so, Grey certainly would never have approved. At a Cabinet meeting which took place two days later, Grey found himself under pressure from Churchill, Charles Masterman

⁹⁰ *Dnevnik*; 1914 09 21. *Ibid.*

⁹¹ This was presumably a reference to Ferdinand's policies. *Utro*; 1914 09 23. *Ibid.*

⁹² *Dnevnik*; 1914 09 23. *Ibid.*

⁹³ *Dnevnik*; 1914 09 21. *Ibid.* The newspaper's source was apparently an article in the Constantinople journal *Sabah*.

and others to accept that war with Turkey was inevitable, and that therefore he should work towards an unqualified understanding with Bulgaria.⁹⁴ Although Masterman argued that the Bulgarians, if they believed they were surrounded, would be tempted to throw in their lot with Germany and Turkey, the Foreign Secretary finally settled only on a further warning to Turkey.⁹⁵

Meanwhile, tales of misfortune related by Bulgarian refugees from Greek and Serbian Macedonia had received lurid treatment in the Sofia press, and Noel Buxton was anxious to obtain firsthand impressions of the situation. However, a proposed expedition to Strumnica had to be postponed when he collapsed in exhaustion on September 22.⁹⁶ Although he was fully recovered by the afternoon of the 23rd, Buxton's temporary indisposition had give him the opportunity to write to his wife about his mission:

...it was a much clearer piece of utility than I had thought likely. I saw that the pro-Entente parties here might make use of us but did not think they would be so delighted as they are. They think it changes the general atmosphere by reminding people to think about England. The pro-Germans are influenced too, because they are just those who applauded me in years past, being the [pro] Macedonian party ... We have broken the back of our task but cannot leave. Things are very unsettled.⁹⁷

Buxton also drafted his second wire to Grey at this time. However, the tone and content of the wire belied the cautious optimism he had expressed in private to his wife.

⁹⁴ Robbins, 1971, 568.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ Noel Buxton to Lucy Buxton; 1914 09 23; holograph. N. B. P.: Box 25 File 3.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

If Buxton believed that he had "broken the back" of his own task, he was less impressed with the performance of the Foreign Office:

It is deeply regretted⁹⁸ that proposals for territorial compensation have been agreed on by Russia and also France, but vetoed by England. This strengthens hands of [the] Germanophil party here. I have avoided suggesting that British Government would favour territorial compensation and have repudiated authority to express opinion on British intentions. But I find universal opinion that if British adhesion to definite territorial proposals is not given, it is very possible that Germanophil party will make successful agitation for attack on Rumania in the event of Rumanian invasion of Hungary. Resentment at treatment of Bulgarians in Macedonia is increasing and invasion of Macedonia is equally possible.⁹⁹

Although Buxton's claim to have avoided any suggestion of territorial compensation was obviously misleading, his point about Macedonia was a valid one. On the morning of September 24, the Buxtons left for Strumnica, accompanied by J. D. Bouchier, permanent Balkan correspondent of the *Times*, and Colonel Miles, the American Military Attaché in Bulgaria. The company stopped briefly en route in a small Macedonian town, where the entire population was said to have turned out to welcome Noel Buxton, who expressed how pleased he was to have arrived in "the newly liberated Bulgarian lands."¹⁰⁰ He also made discreet inquiries amongst those present as to the true state and number of the local refugees. Buxton pursued his investigation in Strumnica, asking newly arrived Bulgarian refugees if any of the ostensibly Greek or Serbian bands

⁹⁸ Presumably, by Buxton himself and his supporters in Sofia.

⁹⁹ Noel Buxton to Sir. Edward Grey; 1914 09 25; copy. N. B. P.: Box 56; File 3. In early November, Bax-Ironside too would alert Grey to the danger of rising popular feeling forcing Government to intervene in Macedonia, and thus committing Bulgaria to siding against us." Sir Henry Bax-Ironside to Sir Edward Grey; 1914 11 08. Stevenson, 156.

¹⁰⁰ *Mir*; 1914 09 28. N. B. P.: Box 59; File 3.

which terrorized them in "occupied" Macedonia were perhaps not of Bulgarian origin.¹⁰¹ To this question the refugees naturally all replied in the negative. Buxton expressed his conviction that in the near future Macedonia would once again become part of Bulgaria, although that would "depend mainly on Bulgaria."¹⁰²

In his next breath, however, Noel Buxton threw discretion to the wind and finally called openly for Bulgaria's immediate entry into the war. The gist of his offending speech was wired from Strumnica¹⁰³ to Sofia, and on September 28, the Liberal party's *Narodni Prava* reported that

Buxton has said that Sir Edward Grey was not satisfied with the hitherto attitude of the Bulgarian government, and that Bulgaria ought to hasten the winning of the friendship of England, because she will dictate the peace and was going to give each one according to his conduct in the present war. The wish of England is that we should not keep neutral but should intervene on behalf of the Triple Entente.¹⁰⁴

Similarly, the independent *Dnevnik* quoted Buxton as follows:

in order the mistakes of the Balkan War should be corrected, Bulgaria ought indispensably abandon her neutrality and participate in the general European War in behalf of the Triple Entente This is the wish of Sir Edward Grey.¹⁰⁵

Both publications were disapproving, and the fact that their respective accounts concur with each other suggests that nothing was lost in the translation.

¹⁰¹ The activities in Macedonia of the *komitadji* (I. M. R. O.), a Bulgarian paramilitary terrorist organization which was receiving secret support from Austria-Hungary greatly exacerbated the already poor relations between Serbia and Bulgaria. Zeman, 75.

¹⁰² *Utro*; 1914 09 27. N. B. P.: Box 59; File 3.

¹⁰³ There is no record as to how Buxton's comments were received in Strumnica.

¹⁰⁴ *Narodni Prava*; 1914 09 28. *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ *Dnevnik*; 19 14 09 28. *Ibid.*

Meanwhile, the Buxtons had left Strumnica on the morning of September 26th, and journeyed to Petrich, where they attended another dinner held in their honor. Present at the gathering were members of the Bulgarian Commission for the Resettlement of Refugees, with whom Noel Buxton conferred at length.¹⁰⁶ Upon their return to Sofia at about six o'clock in the afternoon of the 27th,¹⁰⁷ the Buxtons were informed that certain concerns regarding their personal safety had arisen during their absence. Accordingly, the Bulgarian secret service, in conjunction with the chief of police in Sofia, had "volunteered" their services to ensure the Buxtons' welfare for the duration of their visit to Sofia. To this end, they asked the Buxtons pointedly about their plans for departure, and had enlisted the director of the Hotel Bulgaria as an informant on the Buxtons' movements. According to *Kambana*, this was "misunderstood" by the Buxtons, who "expressed misgivings that the police wished to send them out of the country," quite to the seeming perplexity of the journal's editor.¹⁰⁸

On September 29, the Buxtons announced that they would proceed with their long-postponed trip to Bucharest on the night of October 1.¹⁰⁹ In his autobiography, Noel Buxton alluded only indirectly to the controversy surrounding his departure:

When it seemed that there was no more to be done for a time at Sofia, we thought it best to make an end of our public position by going away to Bucharest.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶ Noel Buxton later presented the Commission with the sum of 1000 francs. *Volga*; 1914 10 02. *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ *Utro*; 1914 09 27. *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ *Kambana*; 1914 10 16. *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ *Dnevnik*; 1914 09 29. *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ Noel Buxton's autobiography; n. d.; copy. N. B. P.: Box 12; File 1.

Nonetheless, while their intention to leave for Romania at some undetermined point in the near future had been public knowledge ever since their arrival in Sofia, their abrupt departure was certainly precipitated by Noel Buxton's blunder. Although Buxton had already found himself obliged to issue some sort of belated denial or retraction of his Strumnica statements, a remark by the editor of *Narodni Prava* suggests that the apology was neither sincere nor convincing:

We are bound to observe that the letter of the respectable Englishman despite its categorical contradiction of certain expressions he uttered at Strumnica does not actually deny the specific facts set forth in the press.¹¹¹

Obviously reluctant to admit defeat, Buxton expressed some of his misgivings in a brief note to his wife on the morning of October 1st: "we *might* now go to Bucharest ... [but] it is impossible to leave. Events drag slowly. Grey might blame us for leaving, we may be wanted later."¹¹²

On that same day the press in Sofia broke the news¹¹³ from London that the British Foreign Secretary had already cleared up any possible misconceptions surrounding the status of Buxton's mission. Despite appearances, however, the timing of Grey's demarche was almost certainly a coincidence. The London correspondent of the Athens newspaper *Estia*, Christos Kessary, had previously requested that Grey dispel certain rumors, widespread in the Greek press, regarding the nature of Buxton's activities

¹¹¹ *Narodni Prava*; 1914 09 30. N. B. P.: Box 59; File 3. The actual text of the retraction does not appear within the Buxton Papers.

¹¹² Noel Buxton to Lucy Buxton; 1914 10 10; holograph. N. B. P.: Box 16. (emphasis mine).

¹¹³ Buxton might normally have been informed in advance through the British Legation, but, given the state of communications in Macedonia, it is unlikely, though not impossible, that the Buxtons learned of the new development prior to their return to Sofia on the 27th, if then.

in Bulgaria. Ironically enough, on September 25, the very day on which Buxton would commit his *faux pas* in Strumnica, the *London Times* had carried Grey's response. It read, in part:

Buxton ... was not sent to the Balkans on any official mission from the British Foreign Office. ... [his] visit to Bulgaria was a private visit, and that there is no foundation whatever for stating that he made offers to the Bulgarian Government at the expense of Greece and Serbia. You are authorized to contradict, on the official authority of the Foreign Office ... [such] statements.¹¹⁴

Prior to the publication of the above, very few specifics about the mission were in fact known outside the British Cabinet. There was no easy way to chart from London the progress of the Buxtons in Bulgaria, especially since the usual lines of communication had been broken by the war. Moreover, Noel Buxton had on occasion authorized his wife to disseminate misleading information. For example:

You finally need to know what you can say about my doings to my constituents, and yet I can't tell you or know what is being said [in London]. The best I can do is to let you mention the *Hussar* as showing that I was officially sent [to Bulgaria].¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ *London Times*; ca. 1914 09 25. N. B. P.: Box 64; File 1. It was widely asserted in the London press that the Greek newspaper reports alluded to by Kessary were manufactured in Berlin so as to foment uneasiness in Greece and Serbia. While the idea that they originated through the machinations of the Dual Alliance was not implausible, the allegations contained in those supposedly contrived reports were also not without basis. Buxton himself had provided ample evidence for such speculation on the part of Athens. Interestingly, three weeks later, the *Spectator* would still state that "The exact business that led to the visit of the brothers Buxton to Bucharest is, of course, not available, but it can safely be taken that their mission was an important one and in the direct interests of their country. Probably they were endeavoring to counteract German machinations in the Balkans and acted as a personal reminder of the way in which England has always protected the interests of Roumania and Bulgaria ... it was distinctly in the national interest that Bulgaria should be encouraged in her attitude of neutrality rather than be coaxed on to the side of Turkey." *The Spectator*; 1914 11 13. N. B. P.: Box 25; File 6.

¹¹⁵ Noel Buxton to Lucy Buxton; 1914 09 23; holograph. N. B. P.: Box 25; File 3.

Some time later he would also ask his wife to "pass the news round that we are doing something for Grey."¹¹⁶

Under the circumstances Grey had been virtually obliged to act as he did with regards to Kessary's challenge. It is also not implausible that the Foreign Secretary had learned of Buxton's performance at the English Speaking League, and had hoped to forestall the possibility of any further Buxton indiscretions. An understandably piqued Buxton subsequently went so far as to characterize Grey's move as one done "in such terms as to throw Bulgaria into the arms of Germany"¹¹⁷ However, although Conwell-Evans asserts that the effect in "official" Sofia as well was "greatly to diminish the value of the mission,"¹¹⁸ it is probable that Buxton's actual status was already known to Ferdinand and Radoslavov.

In any case, the news of Grey's disclosure further discredited the already embattled Buxton, as well as his Bulgarian supporters. Nevertheless, the brothers postponed their scheduled departure until the evening of the 2nd, and promised Gesov that they would return to Sofia within a week or so.¹¹⁹ The brothers also addressed an open letter to the citizens of Sofia, the contents of which were detailed in *Kambana*:

[The Buxtons are] cordially thanking the societies, committees and the individuals who have sent them their kind messages of welcome. They also thank for the many letters, telegrams and resolutions sent to them and express their joy for the expressed love of the Bulgarians towards England. They are

¹¹⁶ Noel Buxton to Lucy Buxton; 1914 10 05; holograph. *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ Noel Buxton's notes; annotated copy; n. d.. N. B. P.: Box 64; File 1.

¹¹⁸ Conwell-Evans, 93.

¹¹⁹ *Dnevnik*; 1914 10 02. N. B. P.: Box 59; File 3.

also expressing their thanks to the press for the generous way it welcomed them and expressed its regard for England.

To his copy of the above, Noel Buxton added, with only the slightest hint of irony,

"Forgive my extravagance! All to help the Foreign Office!"¹²⁰

Of course, Buxton was more inclined to "help" the Foreign Office realign its policies in accordance with those that he himself advocated. With this in mind, at 11 o'clock on the evening of October 2, Noel and Charles Buxton took their leave of the Bulgarians, and headed dutifully by rail in the direction of Bucharest. En route, Noel Buxton was hardly contrite, writing to his wife as follows:

I fear that the only news that has got to you in the press has been about Greek and Turkish alarms. But we did very well to come ... If only Winston would pursue any policy here at all. They give us no help.¹²¹

It would appear as though Buxton was not only satisfied with his own performance to that point, but held the entire British Cabinet collectively responsible for the reverses of the preceding week. Although it possible that he simply wished to impress his new wife, Buxton, as we shall see, would subsequently react in similar fashion to further setbacks during the course of his mission.

¹²⁰ *Kambana*; 1914 10 02. *Ibid.*

¹²¹ Noel Buxton to Lucy Buxton; 1914 10 02; holograph. N. B. P.: Box 16. (emphasis Buxton's). Churchill might already have turned his attention to the possibility of forcing the Dardanelles, moreover, the situation on the western front had again become critical, thereby preoccupying both the British Cabinet and the Foreign Office.

CHAPTER III

The Buxtons reached Bucharest late on October 3, or very early in the morning of the 4th. Their coming did not occasion quite the same level of excitement as had their unexpected arrival in Sofia at the beginning of September, but the presence in the Romanian capital of the President of the Balkan Committee was nonetheless worthy of note. The welcome of the British Legation was warmer than that of Sofia had been, for the British Minister, George Barclay, was Noel Buxton's cousin.

Shortly after his arrival, Buxton was handed a letter from the British Military Attaché in Sofia, Lieutenant-Colonel W. D. Napier, who had written to assure Buxton of his continued support for the latter's efforts. Napier did, however, suggest that in Bucharest Buxton abandon any pretence of potentially reconciling the Serbs, Greeks, Romanians, and Bulgarians. Instead, he should persuade the Romanians and Bulgarians that it was in their mutual interests to form an alliance without reference to the other Balkan states. Should Romania exchange Dobruja for Bulgaria's friendship, it could then enter the war on the side of the Entente without fear of a Bulgarian attack from the south, and tend to its own claims in Bessarabia and Bukovina. If Serbia could be forced to give up Macedonia in exchange for Bosnia-Herzegovina and a port on the Adriatic, Bulgaria too would be satisfied.¹

Noel Buxton had already outlined a similar position prior to his arrival in Bucharest:

¹ W. D. Napier to Noel Buxton; 1914 10 03; holograph. N. B. P.: Box 25; File 3.

Rumania can secure Transylvania if she (1) makes terms with Bulgaria and (2) attacks Austria. They dare not do (2) without (1) and unless she does (2) the Entente will have other plans for Transylvania, so that Rumania would get nothing.²

Shortly thereafter, he elaborated the point:

Both this country [Romania] and Bulgaria count on English support to their claims and national frontiers. I fear they will get no support unless they have backed the Entente by fighting ... It is heartbreaking to listen to endless recriminations of other states, when great practical ends are in question. We gather that Grey despairs of getting help, except from Servia. This is exasperating, when 850 000 soldiers could probably be added to the Entente's armies.³

Buxton hoped of course to impress those views upon the important politicians in Bucharest, as well as King Carol I, the former German prince Charles of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen, to whom Buxton correctly attributed greater influence on domestic political affairs than any other Balkan ruler.⁴ This time around, he refused all newspaper interviews,⁵ for his comparatively muted influence in Romania precluded an attempt on his part to influence public opinion as he had in Sofia. The Buxtons anticipated therefore that a short stay would suffice to persuade the Romanian government to come to some agreement with Bulgaria before it was too late.

The Buxtons held enlightening conferences with, among others, Ionel Bratianu, Minister for War as well as Prime Minister, and also the leading Opposition party leader

² Noel Buxton to Lucy Buxton; 1914 10 04; holograph. *Ibid.*

³ Noel Buxton to Lucy Buxton; 1914 10 07; holograph. *Ibid.* (Buxton's emphasis).

⁴ Conwell-Evans, 95. Carol's opportunistic manipulation of political parties supposedly perpetrated some of the worst features of Romanian public life. "Carol I." *Encyclopaedia Britannica: Micropaedia*. (vol II. 1984 ed.) 579

⁵ Noel Buxton to Lucy Buxton; 1914 10 07; holograph. N. B. P.: Box 25; File 3.

Take Ionescu, whom Buxton typically considered to be the most important figure in Romanian politics at the time.⁶ Both politicians apparently professed themselves in agreement with Noel Buxton, although Bratianu was known to favor the Dual Alliance. Ionescu, conversely, joined the majority of his parliamentary colleagues within the Government and Opposition alike in his resistance to any form of cooperation with the Central Powers.⁷ Although this did not in turn imply their wholesale support for the Entente, it had prevented King Carol from honoring a defensive alliance which he had concluded in 1883 with his Austrian counterpart. Although the treaty had been renewed as recently as February 5, 1913, its existence had been kept secret. Romanian nationalists, seething over the program of Magyarization to which the ethnic Romanians of Transylvania had been subject since the 1867 re-absorption of Transylvania into Hungary, would never have tolerated any form of collaboration with the Dual Monarchy. Instead, on August 3, the Romanian government had opted for neutrality during a dramatic Crown Council meeting which had come to a close when the King left the chamber in disgust.

On the basis of a technicality, the Romanians had also repudiated a clause in the Treaty of Bucharest which had bound them to assist Serbia or Greece in case of an attack by Bulgaria.⁸ However, while no formal public statement to that effect was made, the overall cooling of relations between Romania and the Central Powers was evident.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Luigi Albertini, The Origins of the War of 1914. (trans/ed. Isabella Massey. vol. II, Oxford University Press, 1952) 565.; Sir. George Barclay to Sir Edward Grey; 1914 08 23. Stevenson, 43.

⁸ Albertini, 572-581.

Sazonov, encouraged, had proposed to secure for Romania all those Austro-Hungarian territories in which there was a Romanian majority, in return for active military cooperation against Austria.⁹ Although Bratianu had declined the offer on August 15, the attitude of Romania had been such as to induce a succession of related offers on the part of the Entente. Finally, negotiations with Romania undertaken by Sazonov without the knowledge of his British or French counterparts had culminated in the Russo-Romanian agreement of August 19, although the terms of the pact had been announced only on October 2. Briefly, Romania was pledged to observe benevolent neutrality towards Russia, in return for the right to annex and occupy those parts of Hungary inhabited by Romanians.¹⁰

On October 7, the Buxtons left in the company of Ionescu for the mountain resort of Sinaia, where the King's summer palace was located. Noel Buxton, "intending to combine the friendly with the abject,"¹¹ took advantage of a long-standing invitation from Queen Elizabeth, and on October 10 the Buxtons were granted an audience with her and King Carol. In conversation with Elizabeth, the Buxtons restricted themselves to personal gossip, but with Carol's arrival Noel Buxton returned to business. He recalled, however, that neither the King nor the Queen were inclined to consider seriously his proposals:

⁹ "The Balkans, 1914-15 from the Outbreak of the War to the Offer to Bulgaria," Stevenson, 384.

¹⁰ Sir George Barclay to Sir Edward Grey. *Ibid.*, 102.

¹¹ Noel Buxton's autobiography excerpted in Conwell-Evans, 95. Buxton had visited the Queen (formerly Elizabeth of Wied, latterly famous as the poetess Carmen Sylva) in Germany ten years prior to their meeting in 1914. He commented: "I was charmed with her views, and am convinced that if she were not a queen, but say a retired widow in London, I should cultivate her for her combination of cleverness, intellectuality, simplicity, sweetness, benevolence, and beauty of voice and appearance." *Ibid.*

I fired off my gospel about England fighting for small nations (and therefore being worth while for Rumania to fight for). Whereupon the Queen, whose feelings are violently pro-German, interrupted before he could answer, ridiculing the idea. She complained that the Balkan committee had neglected Roumania. ... Apropos of the entente with Bulgaria, he [King Carol] was very keen for it but could not cede any territory. On the War, he said it was very evenly balanced and it was quite uncertain which side would win. Roumania should be neutral.¹²

On the next morning, it was announced that King Carol had died mysteriously during the night, which gave rise to groundless accusations in Germany that Noel Buxton had poisoned him.¹³ The brothers returned to Bucharest to attend the King's funeral obsequies, which were held on the morning of the 15th. Amidst the crowd which had gathered for the occasion was a young journalist from Constantinople by the name of Hassan Taxim, who had been shadowing the Buxtons for the two preceding weeks. Moments after the brothers ventured out of their downtown hotel and into an open automobile, Taxim took advantage of the funereal commotion to approach and fire several shots at the brothers. The shock of the moment is best captured in Noel Buxton's personal notes, scribbled down soon after the event:

Bang Bang on our right, two or three times before we knew what it meant, as there was a dense buzzing crowd all about, and it only sounded like squibs going off. Then I saw a man firing close by, and realized it was aimed at us. We instinctively flinched and put up an arm to shield ourselves. I remember feeling that if we turned to get out of the car the other side, the man would get nearer and shoot us in the back more easily. It seemed as if the firing would never stop but really he lost no time in getting through his five or six cartridges. They were over before we moved, and I looked around and saw him standing behind the car by himself, as if doubting what to do next and not trying to get away. In a moment he was attacked and on the ground being pummeled. We had each been hit and felt that we might be dying! Charles

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Noel Buxton's autobiography; n. d.; copy. N. B. P.: Box 12; File 1.

looked very yellow lying on his back. I can't help looking anxiously to see if his breathing is normal. ... We tumbled out, my chin pouring blood all over my clothes and everything near me.¹⁴

Although Noel Buxton escaped with only his jaw broken, from a ricochet, he later realized that his pocketbook had providentially deflected a bullet aimed straight at his heart.¹⁵ Charles Roden Buxton had been shot through a lung, but he remained conscious and was able to stagger back to the hotel. Noel Buxton endeavored to clear their suite, which had been invaded by a jostling crowd of Romanian officials and policemen, journalists, hotel staff, and other curious intruders, as well as a succession of doctors competing for the privilege of treating the Buxtons. Then their assailant was brought into the room, handcuffed, the police insisting that Noel Buxton formally identify and interrogate him.¹⁶ Barclay and Bouchier, who spoke some Romanian, eventually arrived and restored order, arranging the Buxtons' transfer to a nearby hospital under the care of the most celebrated surgeon in Romania.¹⁷ Charles Roden Buxton was determined to be

¹⁴ Noel Buxton's notes; ca. 1914 10 16; holograph. N. B. P.: Box 25; File 3. More coherent and complete accounts of the outrage itself can be found in Buxton's autobiography; n. d.; copy; p. 156. N. B. P.: Box: 12; File 4. or in contemporary Bulgarian and Romanian newspapers: translated cuttings; 1914 10 16-18. N. B. P. Box: 59; File 3. A detailed account of the aftermath of the affair can be found in Noel Buxton, Travels and Reflections (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1929) 123-129.

¹⁵ Noel Buxton to Lucy Buxton; 1914 10 29; holograph. N. B. P. Box 16. Buxton supposed that the story of his near escape "might interest constituents."

¹⁶ After their recovery, the Buxtons met Taxim in prison, and were favorably impressed by his manner and personality. An earnest patriot, he had studied in France, and explained his aim as "to punish; to show that Turks are not sheep; to teach a lesson; to show that the Turks do not pardon their enemies." The Buxtons also tried to arrange for his good treatment in prison, and provided him with extra blankets, books, and other amenities. As Noel Buxton explained, "Human contact brings natural instincts into play ... we were no longer abstractions to each other - the assassin on one side, the anti-Turk on the other." Set free when the Germans took Bucharest in late 1916, Taxim became a hero in the Turkish quarter of Smyrna (Izmir) for his exploit in Bucharest, became notorious as a persecutor of Greeks, and consequently was executed when the Greek army took the city in May 1919. Buxton, 125-129.

¹⁷ Take Ionescu's brother, actually. *Ibid.*, 124.

out of any immediate danger within twenty-four hours, although, as Noel Buxton remarked, both brothers felt the need for "a welcome rest."¹⁸

The political fallout from the assassination attempt was intense. It was some time before detailed reports appeared in the British press, but the first news of the attack triggered a wave of sympathy and praise for the Buxtons, who were said to have bled for their country. Although the precise circumstances which underlay Taxim's action were never authoritatively established, most commentators expressed righteous indignation over what they presumed to have been German involvement in the outrage. Taxim's passport had been visaed in Constantinople just after Grey's disavowal of the Buxton mission was published, leading to speculation that "the German plotters, enraged at being foiled in their press campaign [against the mission], are now aiming at the removal of the Buxtons altogether."¹⁹

The German view was forcefully put in the Berlin *Tageblatt*, according to a reprint in the *Times* and other newspapers:

Out of Christianity and hatred of the Turks Buxton did a splendid business for his Fatherland, but when he snapped his mighty jaws one could hear the bones of poor Turkey crushed between them. A wild young Turk has shot Herr Buxton in the jaw. Of course this is a deed which every civilized man must disapprove, but I cannot help myself. I rejoice that it is precisely in the mouth that this Mr. Buxton was wounded. For it was a mouth full of guile and arrogance towards everything that was not English, and so this shot seems to me symbolical. Your own island country has been shot through your esteemed jaw, Mr. Buxton. I know that it is brutal, but with all my heart I hope it may do you and old England good.²⁰

¹⁸ Noel Buxton to Lucy Buxton; 1914 10 17; holograph. N. B. P.: Box 16.

¹⁹ *Daily Chronicle*; 1914 10 17. N. B. P.: Box 59; File 3.

²⁰ quoted in *London Times*; 1914 10 22; holograph. N. B. P.: Box 59; File 2.

Similarly, the Turkish newspaper *Tasfiri-Efkia*r suggested that the outrage "should surprise nobody, inasmuch as by their hostile and malevolent attitude the brothers Buxton have drawn on themselves the hatred of the whole of Islam."²¹ Another, *Jeune Turc*, published an article indignantly repudiating the insinuation made by several Romanian newspapers that the attack was the outcome of a plot for which Turkish political circles were directly responsible.²² *La Roumanie*, for instance, had characterized the affair as an "incredible piece of insolence" though which "one of those creatures raised out of the gutter in Constantinople through the Young Turkish Revolution" had dishonored Romania. It was further emphasized that:

we must draw the attention of the Ottoman Government to the danger of allowing machinations to be carried on at Constantinople, which are instigated by the enemies of Balkan peace. ... The Bulgarians will feel it very deeply that there should exist revolutionary organizations at Constantinople which seek to impose an alliance upon them through the assassination of their greatest benefactors...²³

Although his allegation would remain unsubstantiated, Ionescu himself accused Enver Bey directly of full complicity in the attack.²⁴

²¹ quoted in *Daily Express*; 1914 10 19. N. B. P.: Box 59; File 3.

²² quoted in *Reuters* wire service report; 1914 10 22. *Ibid*.

²³ quoted in *The Spectator*; 1914 11 13. N. B. P.: Box 25; File 6.

²⁴ Noel Buxton himself informed his wife that the attempt was "thought to have been planned by Enver whom we regard as a great friend!" Noel Buxton to Lucy Buxton; holograph; 1914 10 17. N. B. P.: Box 16. Back when the Buxtons had worked to increase the standing of the Young Turk regime within Britain, both Talaat and Enver Bey had accepted the hospitality of the Buxton brothers, who enjoyed their company. See Enver Bey to Noel Buxton; 1908 10 04 and 1911 07 29; holographs. N. B. P.: Box 25; File 6, and also "La grande nation unie et le partie parlementaire union et progress" to Noel Buxton; 1909 02 13; holograph. N. B. P.: Box 56a; File 1.

In Sofia, the Buxtons were initially reported to have died.²⁵ The newspapers printed intimate and sensational accounts of the affair, redolent with emotion but lacking for evidence. There were expressions of sympathy and adulation for the Buxtons and Britain, and, indeed, contrition for past "misunderstandings." Representative of the whole was *Utro*, which waxed poetic over the affair:

We bow down before you, sons of Great England, who resolved to expose your lives to danger to come here and bring us a word of consolation amidst these days of grave trials for the Bulgarian nation...

Reverential bows to you, sincere defenders of liberty, who left your country in these stormy times in order to use your efforts for the removal of a slavery much more inhuman much more hateful than that which your grandfathers fought against.

Reverential bows to you, happy brothers, who perhaps are now lifeless bodies, because your memory will be perpetrated within a suffering nation. For Bulgaria it is indifferent whether you are visiting her with an official or unofficial mission. For her it is enough that you exposed your lives for the Bulgarian cause...²⁶

Even *Narodni Prava* stated that a "feeling of indignation and abhorrence filled the soul of the Bulgarian public ... their feelings found echo in all the politicians."²⁷ Finally, the Bulgarian Minister in Bucharest, Simon Radev, of the Liberal party, conveyed the following to the Buxtons:

Joining the feelings of regret and indignation which yesterday upset the whole Bulgarian nation, we shall be very happy to see MM. brothers Buxton in good health and joyous among us, as they have promised to return from Bucharest to Sofia.²⁸

²⁵ *Dnevnik*; 1914 10 15. N. B. P.: Box 59; File 3.

²⁶ *Utro*; 1914 10 16. *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Narodni Prava*; 1914 10 16. *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

Although it still remained to be seen whether Noel Buxton could exploit public sympathy over the outrage for tangible political advantage, he was not unhappy with the turn of events, as a succession of postcards written to his wife on the 17th of October reveals:

I am sure the Turkish government will try to stop further attempts on us when they see the effect ... I am glad the cause was our work for England; there is a joy in shedding blood for the country...

Barclay has just been to convey a kind message wired by Grey. Dozens of telegrams are arriving from Bulgaria. I think the Turks must be sorry they attempted the "remedy of force." ... the man ... was an awful bungler not to have hit us in the right place. I have always regretted the inefficiency of the Turks but this time nothing else saved us...

I have always thought Turkish attempts in the cards and we lately discussed whether if we went to Constantinople and were killed it would help our cause. I thought not, because no one would have blamed the Turks over-much - we would have been regarded as tempting providence. By sending a man here the Turks have done more to injure themselves and also to drive Bulgaria to our side than in anything we could have conceived. There has always been a chance of attack by a Turkish fanatic before but one could not hope for such an ideal one as this...

My jaw, though cracked, will not be silenced!²⁹

Buxton later wrote to Churchill, reiterating some of his prior convictions:

In regard to military scheme in Balkans which you asked me to work for,³⁰ the situation is favorable. Roumanian action hitherto impeded by the King's wishes being now possible the only remaining difficulty is fear of Bulgaria. The Powers can obviate this without dangerous commitments and with justice to Servia. ... Small powers cannot be expected to settle all questions among themselves. Public opinion would be most powerfully effected by a lead from outside especially from England. I beg to suggest that utterance by yourself ... would greatly help to secure co-operation. It would be reported verbatim here. All steps in support of your policy are believed to be deprecated by our

²⁹ Excerpted from four separate postcards from Noel Buxton to Lucy Buxton; 1914 10 17; holograph. N. B. P.: Box 16, Box 16, Box 25; File 3; Box 16.

³⁰ And which Grey seemed to have discouraged. *supra*, 29,

Government, even when advocated by France or Russia. If it is abandoned, please inform me...³¹

Buxton apparently did not understand, or care, that Churchill, as a responsible member of the government, could not sound off at will, regardless of the circumstances. However, he subsequently wrote his wife as follows: "it is quite impossible to tell how long we must stay. Churchill has wired in response my scheme to our great satisfaction so we must not hurry."³²

Persistent reports from Constantinople that Turkey was poised to enter the war on the side of the Central Powers had in fact greatly reinforced the arguments advanced by Noel Buxton's allies in London.³³ On October 2, Churchill and Lloyd George finally had convinced the dissenting members of the Cabinet to abandon the policy of maintaining the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire, and to adopt a more active diplomacy in the Balkans. Accordingly, Grey on that same day had instructed Bax-Ironside to hand Radoslavov a note in which the Foreign Secretary, while avoiding any specific commitments, stated that he would "not be unsympathetic to Bulgarian claims if large additions of territory were acquired by other states as a result of the war."³⁴ Bulgaria was also promised financial assistance, provided it demonstrated a friendly attitude towards

³¹ Noel Buxton to Winston Churchill; 1914 10 22; copy. N. B. P.: Box 59; File 3. Buxton added that "G. Barclay wished 'are believed' inserted."

³² Noel Buxton to Lucy Buxton; 1914 10 31; holograph. N. B. P.: Box 16. The text of Churchill's wire does not appear.

³³ Ilcev, 35.

³⁴ Sir Edward Grey to Sir Henry Bax-Ironside; 1914 10 02. Stevenson, 107.

"the allies with whom we are acting." Interestingly, this note apparently was handed to Radoslavov only on the 16th of October,³⁵ the day after the outrage in Bucharest.

On October 22, Noel Buxton submitted his third wire to Grey, which summarized his conclusions:

We find opinion in responsible circles that in order to secure military action by Roumania and in event of war with Turkey by Bulgaria it is not desirable to negotiate with small States but that Entente powers should make declaration such as follows, namely:-

First, they support claim of Servia to Bosnia.

Second, in event of Bulgaria forthwith showing friendly neutrality towards Roumania and Servia and undertaking to attack Turkey in case of war between Turkey and Entente, they will support claim of Bulgaria to the parts of Macedonia indicated by Serbo-Bulgarian Treaty 1912, and in case of war with Turkey, they will support claim of Bulgaria to Enos Midia line.

Third, In event of Bulgaria receiving these parts of Macedonia they will support the further claim of Servia to Dalmatian ports.

It is thought important that declaration should be formal and made by the three Powers jointly. Promise to support territorial claims is understood not to be absolute guarantee. ... Above declaration would remove menace of Bulgarian attack which hampers Roumania.³⁶

To his own copy of the above, Noel Buxton added the words "solution! invented in hospital directly after the outrage," although his suggestions were hardly novel. Buxton later claimed that his proposal was endorsed within a week by a joint telegram from the British, French, and Russian ministers in Sofia.³⁷ However, Grey demurred, confident

³⁵ Ilcev, 36. Although the delay could have resulted from, for example, the need to align policies with the other Allied governments, the timing of the note is interesting nonetheless.

³⁶ Noel Buxton to Edward Grey; 1914 10 21; copy. N. B. P.: Box 59; File 3. Buxton asked that copies be sent to Churchill and Lloyd George as well.

³⁷ Noel Buxton's notes; ca. 1914 11 17; copy. *Ibid.*; Conwell-Evans, 94. However, there is no record of such a telegram in Stevenson.

that Serbian Premier Nikola Pasic would eventually abandon his "Great Serbia" orientation in favor of the Yugoslav ideal, and voluntarily cede Macedonia to Bulgaria.³⁸

Sir Arthur Nicolson, permanent under-secretary of the Foreign Office, subsequently minuted "I wish it were possible for Messrs. Buxton to come home. I am a little afraid this roving 'mission' may cause difficulties [with Greece and Serbia]."³⁹

Similarly, Bax-Ironside continued to frown upon the Buxtons' activities, as O'Mahoney wrote to Harcourt:⁴⁰

the minister of a Foreign Power here [Sofia] ... stated that Sir Henry Bax Ironside was endeavoring to bring about the failure of the Buxton Mission. That he had approached him and the Minister of another power.⁴¹ making disparaging statements about the Buxtons, saying were disavowed by the Foreign Office, that they had no authorization whatever official or semi-official, that they were posing under false pretenses. that they were not well connected ... that the whole of their proceedings here was a piece of self advertisement. This statement was made with the avowed object of frustrating their mission at Bucharest and both these ministers were asked to warn their representatives at Bucharest.

³⁸ For more on Grey's apparent misconception see Michael Boro Petrovich, A History of Modern Serbia 1804-1918 (Vol. 2. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976) 632.

³⁹ Christos Theodoulou, Greece and the Entente: August 1, 1914 - September 25, 1916 (Thessaloniki: Institute for Balkan Studies, 1971) 52 n.16.

⁴⁰ O'Mahoney to Harcourt; 1914 11 10; holograph. N. B. P.: Box 59; File 3. O'Mahoney, an Englishman, ran an orphanage in Sofia which the Buxtons had visited in mid-September. Buxton eventually ended up in possession of this letter addressed only to "Harcourt." Lewis Harcourt, Secretary of State for the Colonies from 1910 to 1915, and a member of the War Council from January, 1915, was one potential addressee who would have been in a position "without delay to lay before Mr. Asquith and Sir Edward Grey" the letter in question, as O'Mahoney asked "Harcourt" to do.

⁴¹ O'Mahoney pointed out that "there are only three [ministers] here representing our allies and you may take it for granted that the Servian Minister was not one of the two." He also wrote: "I am not allowed to mention the name of my informant but if I were, you would acknowledge at once that he can be absolutely trusted. ... I must beg of you not to take any steps which would lead to the discovery of his identity." *Ibid.*

Presumably, Bax-Ironside was only attempting to protect Grey's interests, and was not operating under the influence of his personal differences with Buxton, as the latter seems to have assumed. Although Bax-Ironside's staunchly pro-Serb views made him a natural foil to the Buxtons, Charles Roden Buxton actually remarked at one point that his brother's "finest achievement" was

his conquest of Sir Henry Bax-Ironside. ... I am always afraid of matters coming to a final breach between us and him and his refusing even to send telegrams for us or give us prospects. But Noel has guiled him captive, and they sit for hours closeted together, Noel leading him on with discreet questions about the expansion of Servia and Bax clasping him by the hand and saying "You and I, my dear Buxton, will see this thing through."⁴²

In any event, on the morning of October 27, under the direction of Enver Bey and his allies in Berlin, and without the knowledge of the Grand Vizier, the *Goeben* and *Breslau* (re-christened the *Jawus* and *Midilli*) led a fleet of five other Turkish warships into the Black Sea.⁴³ The Ottoman Empire's subsequent entrance into the war against the Entente on October 30 left Noel Buxton positively ecstatic:

What a relief to the mind! Support of Turkey, the greatest blot on English history, at last removed. I have often reflected that I would give my life if I could ensure such a war thereby. Even the great War is now on the side of good.⁴⁴

⁴² Charles Roden Buxton to Lucy Buxton; 1914 11 01; holograph. N. B. P.: Box 25; File 3.

⁴³ Zeman, 60

⁴⁴ Noel Buxton to Lucy Buxton; 1914 11 01; holograph. N. B. P.: Box 13; File 1. Similarly, David Lloyd George impressed Buxton with the following: "The Turks were a human cancer, a creeping agony to the flesh to the land which they occupy, rending every fiber of life. The tread of his bloodstained sandals scorches and withers life out of whole territories and thousands of square miles. The peoples subjected to their rule have for generations been the victim of his insolence, incompetence, and lust, and now that the great day of reckoning has come upon nations I am glad." Noel Buxton's notes; n. d.; copy. N. B. P.: Box 64; File 1.

Meanwhile, the Bulgarian government apparently had received hints from Bucharest that should Bulgaria enter the war against Turkey, Romania would remain neutral.⁴⁵ In addition, the Turkish naval bombardment of Odessa and other Russian ports on October 29 and 30 had given rise to a renewed upsurge of Russophilia within Bulgaria. This complemented the increased Turkophobia occasioned by the attempt on the Buxtons. Consequently, Ferdinand briefly entertained the possibility of an alliance with Russia against the Ottoman Empire, his defensive agreement with the Turks notwithstanding. This possibility was eliminated however, when Sazonov deferred to Grey's view and reemphasized that Bulgaria's prospects in Macedonia would depend solely on what Serbia would willingly concede.⁴⁶

Nonetheless Grey had now been convinced, along with the rest of the Cabinet, by Churchill, Lloyd George, and Masterman that Bulgarian neutrality was now worthless.⁴⁷ Prior British suggestions to Sofia had of course aimed to promote only the reconciliation of Serbia and Bulgaria, keeping the latter neutral in order to allow Greece unrestricted movement while maintaining pressure on Turkey.⁴⁸ But Bax-Ironside reported on November 1 that "if Bulgaria can be prevented from attacking Serbia for three weeks or so, she will, in my opinion, eventually come in against Turkey."⁴⁹ Noel Buxton too

⁴⁵ In accordance with the Crown Council decision. *infra*, 61.

⁴⁶ Crampton, 437.

⁴⁷ Ilcev, 36.

⁴⁸ Robbins, 1971, 569.

⁴⁹ "The Balkans, 1914-15 from the Outbreak of the War to the Offer to Bulgaria," Stevenson, 389.

recognized that time was of the essence and the moment opportune, and on November 2 again wired the Foreign Office through the British Legation in Bucharest:

It is believed here as follows: - Servia would agree to unconditional concession of Vardar line including Velez. If this can be included in offer to Bulgaria her action against Turkey would be secured. Bulgaria being key to whole Balkan situation and Macedonia being key to Bulgarian situation, interests of Entente at critical moment ought not to be sacrificed to short-sighted obstinacy of present Servian Government. Bulgaria would be most impressed if terms communicated by English Government in London.⁵⁰

On November 3, the prospect of territorial gains in Eastern Thrace down to the Enos-Midia line, including the recovery of Adrianople was offered to Radoslavov by Grey, although the Foreign Secretary reiterated that any potential Bulgarian gains in Macedonia still depended upon Serbian cooperation.⁵¹ In response, Radoslavov informed James Bouchier that if Bulgaria could be guaranteed frontiers assigned in its 1913 treaty of alliance with Serbia, the Protocol of Petrograd, and the Treaty of London respectively, Bulgaria would follow any policy desired by the Triple Entente.⁵² Although Savinsky and Buxton were both of the opinion that only such a precise and decisive offer could possibly seduce Bulgaria,⁵³ on November 7, the three Entente powers made only a vague offer of "important territorial advantages" to Sofia. Moreover it was difficult to determine

⁵⁰ Noel Buxton to Sir Edward Grey; copy; 1914 11 02. N. B. P.: Box 59; File 3.

⁵¹ Sir Edward Grey to Sir Henry Bax-Ironside; 1914 11 03. Stevenson, 146.

⁵² Viz. Macedonian territories lying southeast of a line running from Ohrid in the southwest to Mount Golem in the northeast, part of western Thrace including the towns of Kavalla, Seres, and Drama, (with the uncontested zone still to be divided up after the war); that part of Dobruja taken from Bulgaria after the Second Balkan War; and a frontier with Turkey running from Enos (Enez) on the Aegean Sea to Midia (Kiyiköy) on the Black Sea. Sir Henry Bax-Ironside to Sir Edward Grey; 1914 11 03. Stevenson, 148.

⁵³ Robbins, 1971, 570.

from the terms of the offer whether the Entente was seeking Bulgaria's active participation in the war or would even at this attenuated and propitious stage be satisfied with benevolent neutrality.⁵⁴ Even Bax-Ironside suggested that any subsequent offer "should be as formal and definite as possible."⁵⁵ He did express himself nonetheless as "of opinion that Bulgaria will drift into war on our side."⁵⁶

By this time, however, Russian morale had been seriously undermined by various military and diplomatic setbacks, including the opening of a new front in the Caucasus against Turkey. It was supposed in London that the cession of Constantinople might suppress any possible inclination on the part of Russia to conclude a separate peace with the Central Powers, and also deflect Russian ambitions away from eastern Europe.⁵⁷ Accordingly, Britain assured the Tsarist government that the question of the Straits and Constantinople would be settled after the War in agreement with Russia.⁵⁸ From Britain's perspective, a strong Bulgaria was therefore required to safeguard against excessive Russian influence in the eastern part of the Balkan peninsula.⁵⁹ Consequently, Grey then proposed that Serbia be offered Bosnia and Hercegovina, an outlet on the Adriatic, and a common frontier with Greece, as a guarantee for the immediate cession of Macedonia to

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Sir Henry Bax-Ironside to Sir Edward Grey; 1914 11 08. Stevenson, 156.

⁵⁶ Sir Henry Bax-Ironside to Sir Edward Grey; 1914 11 08. *Ibid.*, 160.

⁵⁷ V. H. Rothwell, British War Aims and Peace Diplomacy 1914-1918. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971.) 24.

⁵⁸ Robbins, 1971, 569.

⁵⁹ Ilcev, 36.

Bulgaria.⁶⁰ Correctly interpreting Grey's sudden largesse, Sazonov vetoed the proposal to Serbia, ostensibly on the basis of Britain's previous hesitations about bringing pressure to bear at a time when the military situation in Serbia was precarious. Instead, Sazonov suggested that Serbia be promised the partition of Albania between itself and Greece, but Grey foresaw potential difficulties in the relations of the Entente with Italy if Sazonov's proposal was accepted.⁶¹

Finally, on November 16, the Entente offered, in return for Bulgaria's immediate entry into the war, the Enos-Midiia line to the south, Macedonia to the east of the Vardar river and south of the line demarcated in the Serbo-Bulgarian treaty of 1912, and financial assistance.⁶² Nikola Pasic reacted immediately, warning that if Bulgaria was to seize any part of Macedonia, Serbia would transfer all of its forces from the Austrian to the Bulgarian front.⁶³ Radoslavov therefore demurred, waiting for confirmation from the Entente, and finally reiterated that his country intended to remain neutral. However, Bax-Ironside reported that Radoslavov had promised that Bulgaria would not attack Romania should it decide to join the Entente.

Radoslavov was also said to have told Bax-Ironside that "Events will trend your way,"⁶⁴ and Noel Buxton had meanwhile been working to ensure the accuracy of that

⁶⁰ Grey also hoped that Radoslavov and Ferdinand would fear Russia as a potential neighbor, and moderate their hitherto intransigent stance. *Ibid.*, 35

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² These terms were precisely those which Bax-Ironside, on November 7, had judged to be "adequate inducement to bring Bulgaria round to our side." Sir Henry Bax-Ironside to Sir Edward Grey; 1914 11 08. Stevenson, 154.

⁶³ Ilcev, 37

⁶⁴ Sir Henry Bax-Ironside to Sir Edward Grey; 1914 11 08. Stevenson, 176.

prediction. Fully recovered from their wounds, he and his brother had returned to Sofia on November 11. Although they had been fêted in grand style, and a street renamed in their honor, Noel Buxton had concluded that the outrage had "done all the good that an attack can do."⁶⁵ He consequently welcomed the possibility that he and his brother might again be targeted:

If death was certain, it would be worth it to get Bulgaria to fight. ... How much does death matter? If we can avoid war, much, but now hundreds die daily for an item only [viz. Serbia's refusal to cede Macedonia]. We should be gaining 400, 000 men, probably Roumania and Greece too ... If a profitable death can be had, it is surely a chance to seize. ... We ought not to avoid risk either of public advocacy or of staying on.⁶⁶

However, there were definite indications that Buxton's political relevance had waned considerably, although he remained in close contact with Opposition ministers. His primary preoccupation was simply to keep abreast of the political situation, and hold himself in readiness to intervene as best he could should the situation take a turn for the worse:

The critical moment has not yet come when Bulgaria may be most tempted to go wrong! ... When it comes, we may, if ever, be useful. We have statements ready to publish then, which we can't leave to others.⁶⁷

After about a week and a half of biding his time in the capital, Noel Buxton wrote a revealing letter to his wife:

We are often occupied in weighing the pros and cons about going or staying. It is most difficult. Our duty is like a soldiers' but with no one to give him orders

⁶⁵ Noel Buxton to Lucy Buxton; 1914 11 10; holograph. N. B. P.: Box 69; File 1.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Noel Buxton to Lucy Buxton; 1914 11 24; holograph. N. B. P.: Box 25; File 3. There does not seem to be any copy of those statements however.

... We have friends in all parties, who have influence and whose wobbling might be corrected. The Opposition leaders (i.e. pro-Entente men) beg us not to leave. The Austrophil papers are always attacking us and asking why we don't leave! Perhaps this reveals that we are of value against their policy and if we go they will crow loudly and the Ententists will be depressed. It is like an election! ... Again, if we had a duty to come because of our position with the public here, we have much more now owing to the obliging assassin. Above all how terrible if we left for personal reasons and then Bulgaria just toppled into the German camp. I should never forgive myself for not contributing my effort however small and everyone including Grey would (rightly) say "Why the - did you run away just when you might help after all the trouble and loss that you had taken?"⁶⁸

On the 17th of November, Buxton sent off another wire to Grey, having "endeavored to learn minimum terms which might win Bulgaria." although he admitted that these might "rise further owing to Turkish war and Serbian reverses and need of Entente to secure action by Greece and Rumania:"

Conversations outside government circles confirm opinion expressed in last telegram.⁶⁹ Popular feeling is indifferent about Thrace and favours neutrality unless immediate occupation of Macedonia up to 1912 frontier is offered. Even opposition leaders who have hitherto thought promises of acquisition at end of war would be sufficient, now think occupation of considerable territory is necessary to secure support of people and army ... Provocation inseparable from recruitment of Bulgarian population [in Macedonia] by Serbia forms constant inducement to Bulgaria to accept tempting offers of Austria.⁷⁰

However, Grey informed Buxton that if the Bulgarians insisted on a mandate to occupy Macedonia before Serbia received territorial acquisitions in Austria-Hungary and Dalmatia, it would "make things impossible. If Servia will make concessions it will be very helpful but pressure won't do."⁷¹

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Supra*, 73.

⁷⁰ Noel Buxton to Sir Edward Grey; 1914 11 17; copy. N. B. P.: Box 59; File 3.

⁷¹ Noel Buxton's notes; ca. 1914 11 19. on *Ibid.*

On November 24, the three ministers of the Entente in Sofia addressed a joint communiqué to Radoslavov. Provided only that it maintained a strict attitude of neutrality towards Serbia, Greece, and Romania, Bulgaria was offered a guarantee "that when the time comes for final settlement which will follow the war they [i. e. the powers of the Entente] will remember her attitude by securing for her important territorial advantages."⁷² In response, Radoslavov would eventually declare both in the Bulgarian *Sobranie*, where the Opposition insisted on increased contacts with the Entente,⁷³ and to the British government directly, that nothing "of a nature to modify attitude of neutrality hitherto maintained by Bulgaria"⁷⁴ had transpired. Radoslavov also remarked that Bax-Ironside and his ministerial colleagues would have to make a "much more substantial and definite offer to Bulgaria if they wished to secure her active cooperation."⁷⁵

Essentially, although both the British and the Russians were later anxious to place the blame for hesitation on each other⁷⁶, it was clear, as Buxton had insisted all along, that only the preliminary occupation of Macedonia by Bulgarian troops would have guaranteed Bulgaria's participation. As neither Grey nor, apparently, Sazonov, were willing even at this stage to coerce Serbia into cooperation (Delcassé in France would perhaps have been, but did not share the clout of his colleagues), the Entente had reverted

⁷² Sir George Buchanan to Sir Edward Grey; 1914 11 20. Stevenson, 180.

⁷³ Ilcev, 37

⁷⁴ "The Balkans, 1914 -15, from the Outbreak of the War to the Offer to Bulgaria," Stevenson, 390.

⁷⁵ Sir Henry Bax-Ironside to Sir Edward Grey; 1914 12 09. *Ibid.*, 196.

⁷⁶ Robbins, 1971, 570 n.55.

to its original policy of seeking only Bulgaria's benevolent neutrality. Provided that the military situation developed favorably, this could be accomplished with fewer sacrifices.⁷⁷

On November 27, Noel Buxton had dispatched a sixth and final wire to Grey:

Replying to your message [viz. Grey's objection to Noel Buxton's proposals of October 22 and November 17], I have of course consistently said to Bulgarians that immediate occupation is impossible but please realize that all reliable judges here think Bulgarian attack on Turkey cannot be secured without immediate occupation of at least part of Macedonia. Also that this arrangement is necessary in view of Austria possibly advancing South and putting pressure on Bulgaria.

Russian Minister authorizes me to state his agreement with above.

Serbian representative here privately uses expression that Serbia would obey decision of Entente Powers though of course under protest.

If only Roumanian action is being sought it is still thought necessary to promise 1912 line conditionally to Bulgaria. She would then be recognized as committed to Entente so that the party in Roumania favouring war against Austria whose success depends on reinforcing efforts of Take Ionescu could effectively answer pretext that Bulgaria would attack Roumania.⁷⁸

However, Buxton's impression that the Serbs would be willing to modify their position should they be given the opportunity to do so with dignity was shared by Ferdinand and Radoslavov as well. In fact, Bulgaria also anticipated that the intransigence of the Serbs would further dissolve as their military position continued to deteriorate in the face of a revitalized Austrian offensive. Consequently, separate efforts by Buxton and Savinsky to persuade the Bulgarians formally to specify their terms had been fruitless.

Noel and Charles Roden Buxton were soon on their way back to London. The attitude of the British Foreign Office, and the persistent intransigence of both the

⁷⁷ Ilcev, 37

⁷⁸ Noel Buxton to Sir Edward Grey; 1914 11 27; copy. N. B. P.: Box 59; File 3.

Bulgarian and Serbian governments had finally convinced them that they could do no more for their cause in Sofia. On November 28, two days prior to their departure, Noel Buxton had drafted the text of a final letter of appeal to Radoslavov, although there is no evidence to confirm that it was ever sent. It read, in part:

As suggested by your excellency [sic], we are very glad to record some of the views that we hold upon the present situation ... we have anxiously considered what is the course by which the rights of the Macedonians may be recovered. We are unable to see any practical policy by which this may be achieved except that of adhesion to the "Entente." In our opinion an understanding formally signed by England as well as France and Russia, that precise and adequate concessions shall be made at the end of the war, would be a real guarantee ...[of] the recovery of Macedonia...⁷⁹

The contents of this note would hardly have made much of an impression on the Bulgarian Prime Minister.

The Buxtons were escorted out of the country amidst a renewed chorus of popular disapproval of the Entente. While moderate publications such as *Utro* contented themselves with brief but significant allusions to the fact that the Bulgarians were "a democratic and freedom loving people who together with their political leaders sincerely wish to live in tranquillity,"⁸⁰ pro-Government publications were somewhat more direct. *Kambana*, for example, spoke out against Buxton as follows:

Let them, the blind and deaf in Bulgaria learn through the authoritative word of the Buxton brothers that the Triple Entente is demanding our ...army ... in order to save Egypt... When we needed the word of honor [in 1913] of Sir Edward Grey, the Sazonovs and the Delcassés, we received only malicious mockery from the capitals of the Triple Entente.

Today they want to sell their honest promises against new Bulgarian blood without providing the least guarantee that after we render them our best service

⁷⁹ Noel Buxton to Vasil Radoslavov; 1914 11 28; holograph; draft version. N. B. P.: Box 57; File 6.

⁸⁰ *Utro*; 1914 11 19. N. B. P.: Box 59; File 3.

we shall not again be severely punished, as we were last year. Both the persons and the policy of the Triple Entente are the same.⁸¹

On the day of the Buxtons' departure, the same journal bid them farewell in the following manner:

Messrs. Buxton will carry away with themselves from Bulgaria a whole bag of greetings and praise for their speeches from almost all great and small Russophiles in Bulgaria.

Before leaving Sofia, the Buxton brothers declared loudly ... that Bulgaria ought immediately to join the Triple Entente and declare war to Turkey and Austro-Hungary, or else England and the Powers of the Triple Entente will not recognize any territorial aggrandizement.

We want to know whether all those who were greeting the Buxton brothers as the most noble friends to Bulgaria are of the same opinion?⁸²

At 11:30 in the morning of November 30, the Buxtons presented themselves at the train station, where a great number of their remaining supporters had assembled to see them off, including the mayor and numerous Opposition politicians. Their cheers mingled with the Buxton's shouts of "Long live Bulgaria,"⁸³ as the train pulled away from the station.

* * *

So ended the Buxtons' sojourn in Bulgaria,⁸⁴ and with it Noel Buxton's grand opportunity to influence the conduct of British foreign policy in the Balkans. On their

⁸¹ *Kambana*; 1914 11 29. *Ibid.*

⁸² *Kambana*; 1914 11 30. *Ibid.*

⁸³ *Dnevnik*; 1914 11 30. *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ It would be a full twenty years before Noel Buxton was to return to the Balkans. Perhaps he had been somewhat disillusioned by the events of the preceding four months. As the years passed he also became increasingly preoccupied with domestic affairs. However, he continued steadfastly to uphold the cause of Bulgaria, regardless of its ultimate accession to the Central Powers in late 1915, and spoke out after the Armistice against the Treaties of Sèvres and Neuilly. Twenty-four years later, in April 1939, he would revive his 1914 arguments pertaining to the need to secure Bulgaria for the Allied cause, this

way home, the determined Buxtons nevertheless spent two full weeks in Nis, for informative but ultimately futile discussions with Nikola Pasic and King Alexander Karadjorjevic. The Buxtons subsequently stopped briefly for similarly inconsequential meetings with, respectively, Eleutherios Venizelos and King Constantine in Athens, and Théophile Delcassé, Georges Clemenceau, and Alexander Izvolski, the Russian Ambassador to France, in Paris. By January 6, 1915, the Buxton brothers were back in London, where they were afforded a decidedly cool reception by Grey and Asquith.⁸⁵

Undaunted, Noel Buxton continued to disseminate his views in a series of memoranda,⁸⁶ letters to the press, and private conferences with persons of influence. He was eventually able to arrange three secret meetings between Lloyd George and the Bulgarian Minister in London, P. Hadzimisev, which took place early in the summer. The episode culminated only in confusion when Lloyd George, following Buxton's lead, made unauthorized promises of his own to Bulgaria regarding proposed Greek and Serbian concessions, and in turn incurred the censure of Grey and Asquith.⁸⁷

In early September, with Bulgarian troops massing on the Macedonian frontier, Noel Buxton proposed that he make a final, desperate, visit to Sofia. However, his offer

time within the context of the Second World War. Noel Buxton's memorandum: 1939 04 29; copy. NPB: Box 63; File 1

⁸⁵ Fry, 282. Adequate coverage of Buxton's post-1914 propaganda activities in London with respect to the Balkans can be found in other secondary sources, including Anderson; Charles Roden Buxton, "Nationality." (Towards a Lasting Settlement, ed. Charles R. Buxton. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1915.); Buxton and Buxton; Noel Buxton and C. Leonard Leese, Balkan Problems and European Peace, (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1919.); Conwell-Evans; Fieldhouse; Ilcev; and Robbins, 1971.

⁸⁶ The most important of these, handed in January, 1915, is quoted in full by Buxton and Leese, 77.

⁸⁷ The best account of the episode is found in Noel Buxton's autobiography excerpted in Conwell-Evans, 110-113.

was firmly rejected by the Foreign Office, which had decided that the Balkans must be protected from any further agitation by the Buxton brothers.⁸⁸ When Bulgaria ultimately entered the war as an ally of the Central Powers on October 15, 1915, Buxton, somewhat unfairly, declared in public that Foreign Office conservatism and incompetence had from the beginning combined to cripple legitimate initiatives in the Balkans.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Fry, 286.

⁸⁹ *Ibid*, 285.

CONCLUSION

During the course of his mission, Buxton was definitely hampered by his tendency to pursue his cause from the perspective of a politician, which of course he was, rather than that of a diplomat. His misapprehension that public opinion was as politically effective in Bulgaria as it was in Britain served to undermine his position in Sofia. Furthermore, his apparent inability or unwillingness to recognize that London back bench politics were unwelcome on the international front led to prejudice against him within the British Foreign Office. It is not unlikely that his advice was often dismissed in London without contemplation.

On the other hand, it should be noted that Buxton's indiscretions in Bulgaria had gained significance only through Grey's willingness to keep secret within the Cabinet the question of whether or not Buxton was to be regarded as an official emissary of the British Government. It is not impossible that the Foreign Secretary was allowing himself the luxury of having Buxton to encourage Bulgaria to side with the Entente through "official" promises which could later be disavowed should Serbia or Greece object. Buxton's own notes on the mission, written at an unspecified date, seem to support this hypothesis: "My status therefore? Nominally unofficial? To pursue these aims on behalf of Government without incurring suspicion of Serbia and [Greece] unduly?"¹

In any case, despite having ultimately achieved little of substance during the course of his mission, Buxton was hardly modest upon his return to London in January,

¹ Noel Buxton's notes; n. d.; holograph. N. B. P.: Box 64; File 1.

1915. First of all, he dismissed any criticism of his tactics in Sofia, remarking rather arrogantly that it

was more than irritating to be encouraged to come, to leave all manner of work and also wife and family, to incur great efforts and expense, and (as it turned out) great dangers ... and then to find that every suggestion for action ... was rejected and shelved.²

Moreover, according to him, it was in large part due to his efforts that the Bulgarian government was less impatient than it had been at the beginning of the War to ally with the Central Powers.³ In actuality, the improving military fortunes of the Entente after September had exerted a far greater temporizing influence over Ferdinand and Radoslavov than had Buxton's arguments. Similarly, Conwell-Evans' subsequent assertion that Buxton eventually "had the gratification of seeing his policy adopted by the Entente,"⁴ in the Allied note to Bulgaria of the 29th of May was only partly true as well. Again, favorable military developments, this time in the Dardanelles, rather than Buxton, had instigated the shift. Moreover, the decision of the Foreign Office to revise somewhat its approach to Bulgaria was hopelessly belated.

Buxton's primary target had in any case been the pro-Entente circles in Sofia, whom he had successfully led to believe that Great Britain recognized and was sympathetic to Bulgaria's national demands.⁵ His efforts in this regard were a natural outgrowth of the fact that he and his like-minded colleagues in London were confident

² *Ibid.*

³ Fry, 281.

⁴ Conwell-Evans, 112.

⁵ Ilcev, 35.

that Bulgarian loyalty could be secured through working exclusively with the political Opposition in Sofia. Although he rarely found fault with Grey's estimate of the probable intentions of the Bulgarian Government, Buxton considered that estimate to be irrelevant given that he had "friends and supporters" in Bulgaria who would overthrow their Government if only they received "encouragement" from the British Foreign Office.⁶ He was therefore disinclined to consider seriously the positions taken either by Grey in London, or Ferdinand and Radoslavov in Sofia. In this, however, Buxton totally misread political developments in Bulgaria since the mid-1890's. The King and his Prime Minister were in complete political control, and the Opposition was fragmented, with those parties which had not been totally discredited in the popular eye by the disastrous Second Balkan War in 1913 committed to neutrality.⁷

Moreover, thanks to Grey's understandable reluctance to propose to Bulgaria concessions involving Macedonia that might anger the Serbs without necessarily securing the support or even neutrality of Bulgaria, Buxton was unable to propose even a viable alternative to the forthcoming alliance with the Central Powers. Buxton's "common-sense" policy of providing compensation all round at the expense of the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empires - to Bulgaria in Macedonia, to Serbia in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Adriatic, to Greece in Asia Minor, and to Romania in Transylvania and Bessarabia, was essentially unworkable in practice. First of all, Buxton underestimated the difficulties involved in coordinating the proposed territorial adjustments with the

⁶ Fieldhouse, 183-186.

⁷ Crampton, 445.

competing political and territorial ambitions of Russia, France, and even Britain.⁸

Furthermore, Buxton's assumption, shared by many of his compatriots, that an equitable division of the Balkans on national lines would lead to the creation of a Balkan league was a fallacy. None of the Balkan states, Serbia and Bulgaria least of all, was particularly interested in an equitable division of the region, but rather in the greatest advantage to themselves, and the Central Powers could obviously outbid the Entente.⁹ In this respect, the assumption of Sir Edward Grey and his Foreign Office staff that diplomatic overtures in the Balkans were useless without the prior support of favorable military action, was correct.

Buxton therefore failed to achieve the one specific diplomatic coup which he might conceivably have attained for London; namely, overthrowing the conviction, widespread in Sofia, that if Bulgaria ever were to commit itself to fight on the side of the Entente, Britain, as a guarantee of the postwar reversion of Macedonia to Bulgaria, would as a prerequisite have to secure its prior occupation by Bulgarian or Entente troops. Instead, Buxton expended even more energy on ineffectual attempts to persuade Grey and the rest of the Foreign Office that it would be in the best interests of Britain to bring their Balkan policy in line with Bulgaria's demands. However, the collective wartime British psyche was more inclined to solidarity than dissidence.

Also unwelcome to contemporary governments was Noel Buxton's presence at the forefront of the development of the idea that social morality rather than national interest

⁸ Fry 283.

⁹ Calder, 44.

or political practicality should determine foreign policy. Buxton hoped that this would be achieved through of the democratization of foreign policy, effectively subordinating the input of specialists and experts to that of institutions such as the House of Commons, or individuals such as Buxton himself. Foreign Policy from a Back Bench 1904-1908, written in 1932 by T. P. Conwell-Evans, Buxton's private secretary, was in large part a castigation of the evils of secret diplomacy and the alliance system. The theme was subsequently explored through the more objective approach of A. J. P. Taylor and later H. N. Fieldhouse, both of whom attempted to locate Buxton within the annals of Dissent in British politics (in The Trouble Makers and "Noel Buxton and A. J. P. Taylor's *The Trouble-Makers*," respectively).

Today, however, democratic ideals of morality seem to have become equated with capitalist ideology. The result has been not the international harmony and peaceful Christian rationality and goodwill envisioned by Noel Buxton and his like-minded contemporaries but rather the media-fed imposition of either or both economic and military sanctions by the Western democracies on a selected assortment of offending nations.

Regardless, Buxton's expedition is thus most appropriately considered as a pioneering example of the application of apparently democratic principles to power politics. Several years before the First World War, at a meeting of the Balkan Committee, Buxton had in fact already expressed his determination to contribute

something to the difficult problem of how moral principles ought to be applied to foreign politics ... not always seeing clearly what the result would be ... [and] keeping the cause to justice.¹⁰

¹⁰ Balkan Committee document; holograph; n. d. (pre-1914). N. B. P.: Box 56a; File 1.

His 1914 mission to Bulgaria was simply another means to that end, for the "cause of justice" had long been for Buxton synonymous with that of Bulgaria. From Buxton's perspective, at least, his expedition could therefore be deemed a success.

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