

NOEL BUXTON: PORTRAIT OF A PHILANTROPHIST AS A TURCOPHOBE

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A THESIS SUBMITTED TO

**THE INSTITUTE FOR GRADUATE STUDIES IN
ECONOMICS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES IN PARTIAL
FULFILLMENT OF REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
OF MASTER OF ARTS IN HISTORY**

BILKENT UNIVERSITY

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SEPTEMBER, 1997

T 64422

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ABSTRACT

In Britain, the Balkan peoples, including Turks, were often cast into political roles demanded by British political theater. The Westerners who talked about the Balkan peoples often had their own, often non-Balkan agenda. Most commentators in the West were partial, taking one or the other sides, usually against the Turks. This paper will try to exemplify this attitude in the personality of Noel Buxton, British politician, philanthropist, and founder of the Balkan Committee. His approach to reform in the Ottoman Empire, his reaction to Young Turk revolution, the Balkan Wars and the First World War, his dilemmas, his 'bartering of principles for pragmatism.' is going to be scrutinized. The sources of Buxton's decidedly biased approach to the region and the Turks is going to be traced in his religious and personal roots as well in his relation with the radical-dissenter ethos.

ÖZET

İngiltere’de, Balkan milletleri ve Türkler, genellikle İngiliz iç siyasetinin gerektirdiği rollerle temsil edilirler. Balkan milletleri hakkında yazanların çoğunlukla kendi siyasi gündemleri vardır. Batıdaki birçok yorumcunun bölgeye bakışı taraflı ve genellikle Türk aleyhtarı olmuştur. Bu tez, bu tür yaklaşımları, İngiliz politikacı, Balkan Komitesi’nin kurucusu ve başkanı Noel Buxton’ın kişiliğinde örneklendirmeye çalışacaktır. Buxton’ın Osmanlı İmparatorluğu’ndaki reform hareketlerine bakışı, Jön Türk devrimine, Balkan Savaşlarına, Birinci Dünya Savaşına tepkisi, çıkmazları, çelişkileri, ‘prensiplerini pragmatizmle takas edisi,’ Osmanlı İmparatorluğu’na taraflı yaklaşımının kökleri, genelde Buxton’ın yaşadığı geç-Viktorya dönemin siyasi ve kültürel atmosferinde, özelde ise Buxton’ın kişisel ve dini geçmişi ile ‘köktenci-muhafız’ akımlarla ilişkilerinde aranacaktır.

There is probably no corner of the world about which so many illusions have centered and so many lies have been told as the Balkan peninsula, among Englishman at any rate. For some reason or another the interesting nationalities whose home it is have always exercised a fascination over the mind of the English politician. While the Balkan people have played a number of different roles before the British public—appearing now as Christian martyrs, now as bloody murderers, at one time as the champions of liberty, at another as tyrannous oppressors—they have never been presented quite simply in their own natural character. The reason is that the men who have written about them have, almost without exception, had an axe to grind or a hobby to ride. So that the Balkans have always been used as a stalking horse for a principle and superstition--the Byron myth, the Gladstone tradition, the Christian faith, the Russian bogey, the cult of the underdog, and so on. Even the best informed and least sentimental writers have as a rule, briefed themselves on one side or another in the interminable and innumerable quarrels of that most turbulent of disturbed areas.

Francis Gerald. 'Distressful Peninsula,' 1915.

INTRODUCTION

In Britain, the Balkan peoples, including Turks, were often cast into political roles demanded by British political theater. The Westerners who talked about the Balkan peoples often had their own, often non-Balkan agenda. Most commentators in the West were partial, taking one or the other sides, usually against the Turks. This paper will try to exemplify this attitude in the personality of Noel Buxton, British politician, philanthropist, and founder of the Balkan Committee. His approach to reform in the Ottoman Empire, his reaction to Young Turk revolution, the Balkan Wars and the First World War, his dilemmas, his 'bartering of principles for pragmatism.' is going to be scrutinized. The sources of Buxton's decidedly biased approach to the region and the Turks is going to be traced in his religious and personal roots as well in his relation with the radical-dissenter ethos.

Noel Buxton was not so famous as Byron, Gladstone or even Mme Mitterand of today but he was no less important as a Turk-basher. It is a fair bet that Noel Buxton would be a harsh opponent of the Refah Party if he had lived now. He might also cherish the new orthodoxy of the 'clash of civilizations', though he might propose some modifications about the 'Balkan races.'

Noel Buxton's interests in foreign policy can be divided into as follows: the Turkish Empire generally but more specifically the problems of Turkish rule in the Balkans and Armenia; the Anti-Slavery Society and in particular the question of the continued existence of slavery in Abyssinia; the whole problem of Britain's relationship with Germany before the Great War, the attempts to find a negotiated peace during the War, particularly in 1916 and 1917, the fierce debate over the Versailles settlement, the crisis of the 1930s and then again the attempt to find a negotiated peace between 1939 and 1942.

This paper will confine itself to Buxton's activities, ideas and writings on the Ottoman Empire and the Balkan Peninsula which absorbed most of his time and energies especially between 1900 and 1915. There were dramatic twists in his outlook towards the region and some more consistent elements. What led to these changes? How was he conditioned by the earlier assessments of the region? What was common and unique in his approach? Is he a thinker to be reckoned with?

Chapter One -

The Background to Noel Buxton's Approach to the Balkans and the Turks

Noel Buxton's childhood was spent in a rather oppressively dignified home. There was considerable wealth in the family which came largely from a brewery. Although the Buxtons had been Independents of the kind that had followed Cromwell in the seventeenth century, they had converted to the Anglican Church in the eighteenth and were thus able to sit in the House of Commons. Their religious inspiration now came from their frequent marriages into prominent Quaker families, whose social conscience seemed to provide the motivation for many actions of the Buxtons. In the nineteenth century this religious inspiration was deepened by the evangelical movement in the Anglican Church, which profoundly influenced the members of the Buxton family and certainly Noel Buxton.

There were a number of prominent persons who were closely related to the Buxton family. Elizabeth Fry, one of the most influential prison reformers of the nineteenth century; Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton, leader of the abolition movement in the British Empire and who was known as 'the Liberator.' There can be no doubt that to have been the great-grandson of Thomas Fowell Buxton, "who won imperishable fame for the part he played in abolishing slavery,"¹ would have been something of a burden. Noel's grandfather must have been, as they say, 'a hard act to follow'. It was his persistent advocacy in the House of Commons that brought about the 1833 Act to abolish slavery in

¹ *Church Family Newspaper*. 18.10.1912; *The New York American*, 16.7 1911; Anderson., pp. 17-20.

the British Empire². Noel Buxton was extremely proud of his great-grandfather and commissioned a biography of him. Noel wanted to be like his grandfather, only better. He set his great grandfather as an example for himself. He was desperate to prove himself as an honorable and high-minded gentleman.

Buxtons were a family of Nonconformist Gladstonian Liberals. Since the time of the eastern crisis of 1875-8, when Bulgaria with the help of Russia had secured her unity and independence in the Treaty of San Stefano and then saw its victory nullified at the Congress of Berlin on the insistence of Benjamin Disraeli, the Buxton family held their country responsible for the protection of those Bulgarians who remained under Ottoman rule.³ This was the one single point which Noel Buxton raised tirelessly in his all books, articles, interviews and reports. What is wrong with earlier foreign policies of Great Britain, he thought, was that Christian morality only scarcely informed it. Then at least a ray of hope dawned by with Gladstone. He tried to prove in vain that a policy based on morality will serve British interests. "Gladstone aroused the country to its senses, appealing not only to humanity, but to an intelligent view of human interests; for if you want a barrier against Russia you will find it, not in a dying despotism, but a in the breasts of free men."⁴

² Robert Vogel. 'Noel Buxton: The Trouble-Maker', *Fontanus*, vol.3 no. ?, p. 132.

³ Mosa Anderson, *Noel Buxton: a life*. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1952. pp.32-3; T. P. Conwell-Evans, *Foreign policy from a back bench, 1904-1918: a study based on the papers of Lord Noel-Buxton*. London: Oxford University Press, 1932 .p. 5; H.N. Fieldhouse, 'Noel Buxton and A.J.P. Taylor' in Martin Gilbert ed. *A century of conflict, 1850-1950*. London, H. Hamilton, 1967. p. 179; Lynn H. Curtright, *Muddle, indecision, and setback : British policy and the Balkan States, August 1914 to the inception of the Dardanelles campaign*. Thessaloniki : Institute Balkan Studies, 1986. p. 21

⁴ Noel Buxton. *Europe and the Turks*. London: John Murray, 1907. P. 32.

Noel's father Sir Fowell Buxton got so angry with Disraeli's eastern policy that, not unlike Jimmy Goldsmith's Referendum Party, he unsuccessfully fought for a seat in the Parliament on the single issue of 'Turkish oppression of the Bulgarian Christians'.⁵

Noel Buxton always seems to ask the question 'what would Gladstone do in the same situation? Sir Mark Sykes, co-architect of the famous Sykes-Picot agreement wrote to him that "you present, though you may not realise it, the Great Gladstonian tradition in the Balkans."⁶ Gladstone's most recent biographer, Roy Jenkins, who made the opposite of the journey Buxton made from Liberal to Labor, could not decide, perhaps not uncharacteristically, what were Gladstone's real motives during his Midlothian campaign following the 'Bulgarian horrors,' which played a very important role in the shaping of the image of the Turk in Britain and the West in general. Was he "looking for a cause for which, with a clap of thunder and whiff of a smoke, he could re-emerge as the dominating central figure of politics" after two boring years of early retirement, or whether was he "seized with a passionate sympathy for the sufferings of the Balkan Christian communities."⁷ His knowledge of Bulgaria was "far from profound."⁸ His prose, however, was very strong. He defined the Turk as a 'cannibal.' The Ottoman Empire was 'impotent for reformation.' The Turks had indulged in 'abominable and bestial lusts' and they were responsible for scenes 'at which Hell itself might almost

⁵ Anderson, *Noel Buxton: a life*. p. 33.

⁶ Mark Sykes to Noel Buxton. February 10, 1915.

⁷ Roy Jenkins, *Gladstone*. London : Macmillan, 1995. pp. 401. For the definitive statement of the later view see Richard Shannon. *Gladstone and the Bulgarian agitation of 1876*. London : Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1963.

⁸ Jenkins, *Gladstone*, p. 403.

blush.”⁹ Gladstone saw “Ottoman Christians as being in need of deliverance from the Turks, whom he regarded as a scourge sent to punish mankind.”¹⁰

Disraeli, on the other hand, ridiculed what Gladstone wrote and told about what had happened in the Balkans at the time “as inventions prompted by Liberal lack of patriotism masquerading as conscience.”¹¹ “There is always the suspicion about Gladstone that he was really an actor, moving from one great line to the next.”¹² Gladstone and his followers were so deeply inflamed against the Turks on religious grounds as well as humanitarian grounds, that they “fail to distinguish between the good and bad elements in the nation, and were unwilling to credit it with any capacity to reform within.”¹³

So it was not difficult to pin down the sources of his anti-Turkishness. Gladstone, for instance, was an obvious early influence. Noel was seven years old when Gladstone embarked upon his Midlothian campaign in 1876. His father was doubtless one of those who “would gather their children and their servants on Sunday evenings, after prayers, and would act out, gestures and all, these great Gladstone speeches.”¹⁴

⁹ Ibid., pp.403-4.

¹⁰ Jeremy Salt., *Imperialism, evangelism and the Ottoman Armenians, 1878-1896*. London : Frank Cass, 1993. p. 154.

¹¹ Jenkins, *Gladstone*, p. 405

¹² Stone, ‘Booming voice of..’ p. 7.

¹³ Allen Upward. *The East and of Europe: the report of an Unofficial mission to the European provinces of Turkey on the eve of the revolution*. London: John Murray, 1908. p. 355.

¹⁴ Norman Stone, ‘The Booming Voice of Liberalism ’, New York Times Book Review. 1997. p.

After a few years of working as a secretary for his father, he sentenced himself to long, uncomfortable journeys in Japan, China, Persia and Armenia.¹⁵ What was originally written about James Bryce, the author of *Holy Roman Empire* and *American Commonwealth*, was equally true for Buxton: He “was known simply to have an insatiable appetite for traveling to any country you cared to mention, particularly if mountains were thrown in.”¹⁶

He only rarely traveled for pleasure, but there was no part of the world where he did not recognize beauty and poetry as well as human suffering.

Almost every journey involved some issue that he wanted to report on or speak to and therefore entailed much writing in the form of reports, letters and lecture preparation, particularly when they were issues which he felt demanded a change in the current British policy.¹⁷

Noel Buxton had first visited the Balkan peninsula in 1899. The main reasons that sent Buxton to the Balkans in the first place were his ill-health and curiosity:

My first visit to the Balkans was by order of the doctor, who urged me to cure an affection of the throat by a visit to sunny lands. The Riviera would be boring and Italy familiar. I saw a chance of novelty. The maps of Europe showing how the tangled railways of Austria-Hungary suddenly ceased to the South, and only a single attenuated line ran on, piercing the whole Balkan Peninsula, had long roused me to wonder why lands so near should be untrodden. Greece, still unreachable except by sea, and European Turkey satisfied the doctor's insistence on sun. I made for Athens, rode across the Peloponnese, and returning by Constantinople, Sophia, and Nisch, secured some rough travel in Macedonia and that part of Turkey which was then called Old Serbia.¹⁸

¹⁵ Noel Buxton, *Travels and reflections*. Boston and New York, Houghton Mifflin company, 1929.

¹⁶ Keith Robbins. ‘Experiencing the Foreign’: British foreign policy makers and the delights of travel.’ In Michael Dockrill and Brian McKercher (ed.) *Diplomacy and world power : studies in British foreign policy, 1890-1950*. New York : Cambridge University Press, 1996. P. 26.

¹⁷ Vogel, ‘Noel Buxton: The Trouble-Maker’, p. 134.

¹⁸ Anderson, *Noel Buxton: a life*. p. 49.

For Buxton, the Balkans were what Western Europe was not: Idyllic, primitive, honest, authentic, medieval and folkloric. For him Albania was a country as wild as Afghanistan. It was a “relic of the Middle Ages, brought to our doors by the Orient Express”¹⁹. His approach to the country in particular and the Balkans in general, was not unlike that of a conservationist who wanted to conserve rare animal species. Bulgaria, Serbia and Romania were “once in the front of civilization, long enslaved, and now set free.” He likened them to children who still has a lot to learn from their Western elder brothers. This strikes a modern reader as an unconsciously telling phrase which reveals much about Buxton's paternalist attitude towards Balkans.

He felt the double desire to be enthusiastic about something and against another. All aristocratic amateur intellectuals had that quality at that time, and he obediently followed the suit. “To the Quaker strain in his make up the call to service was irresistible.”²⁰ Coming from an ennobled family²¹ with a rich history in public affairs, “he was looking for a cause to devote his energies and talents. He found it in ‘the pitiable condition of Macedonian peoples’”²² It was a good brave cause. The attractions of warning England of dangers insufficiently visible to the majority, the established, the reactionary, the complacent must have been tempting. The Balkans provided for Buxton’s mediocre intellect three different things with which to toy: indirect British interests which, being peripheral, enabled him a hinterland with which to make wild guesses and errors; a moral hinterland— western European white man’s burden of the Balkan peoples

¹⁹ Noel Buxton. *Europe and the Turks*, p.12.

²⁰ Anderson, *Noel Buxton: a life*. p. 26.

²¹ “...a family which is a genealogist’s dream.” Vogel. ‘Noel Buxton: The Trouble-Maker’, p. 132-4.

²² Fieldhouse, ‘Noel Buxton and A. J. P. Taylor,’ p. 179.

who were European enough to be Christian, primitive enough to be original, authentic, different and medieval; and the Asiatic mind which, being an Oriental enigma, was undiscoverable, even more primitive and strong. Buxton valued the question of Near East because he thought it raised questions on the important topics of "the interests of Great Britain, ancient and modern politics, international ethics, the picturesque survival of medieval Europe... and the meaning of civilization itself."²³

Buxton's anti-Turkish prejudices were the prevalent sort in England for nearly hundred years. The Ottoman Empire and the Turks in general supplied a rich fund of demonology for the European Liberals. The cumulative unpopularity of the Ottoman Empire and the Turk in British public opinion was in the result of the medieval Christian polemic against Islam.²⁴

Radicals-Dissenters

The British upper-middle and upper classes had generally been ready to use foreign parts of the world as a playground for their consciences. "Turk-bashing was (as it has remained) Exercise 4 (a) in any manual for the would-be radically chic."²⁵ The affairs of Near East were "not easily accommodated into the Anglocentric, Whiggish perspective on foreign affairs held by the most radicals, reformers, and liberals."²⁶ For most of them

²³ Noel Buxton. *Europe and the Turks*, p. Vii.

²⁴ See my 'Islamic-Western relations: encounters, perceptions and responses, 7th century- 1492'. Unpublished (!) term paper. Submitted to Paul Latimer. 1996.

²⁵ Stone, 'Booming voice of..' p. 8.

²⁶ Miles Taylor. *The decline of British radicalism, 1847-1860*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995. P. 224.

Turkey “occupied a half-way house between European civilization and oriental or Asiatic barbarism.”²⁷

Radicals had a “commitment to the defense of small nations.”²⁸ Buxton did not accept the idea that “small nations are a failure.”²⁹ But they did not really think much about nations and nationalism as much as they would like others to believe. They murmured things like the “plurality of nations freely coexisting and mutually benefiting one another,”³⁰ but these were far from clear. Bryce for instance, believed that “small peoples could, indeed should, be absorbed into larger units, but they could not be coerced into unity.”³¹ “In adopting ‘one or another of the different races for a favorite pet,’ their Liberalism periodically was a victim of their partiality...This in turn caused friction among the radicals themselves whenever national movements came into conflict.”³²

There was a tendency among too many of the Dissenters to self-righteousness. One gets the impression that they believed that those who disagreed with them were not only mistaken (which is possible) but also necessarily wicked. They posed as “a misunderstood elite of the enlightened” and behaved as if that “a population which supported other policies than theirs must be, by definition, ‘unthinking.’”³³ But who is a Radical? A.J.A Morris defined him as an “anti-imperialist, subscribing to the ideals of universal disarmament, friendly relations with all countries, open diplomacy and the

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Howard Weinroth, ‘Radicalism and nationalism: An increasingly Unstable Equation,’ p. 219.

²⁹ Noel Buxton. *Europe and the Turks*. p. 124.

³⁰ Weinroth. ‘Radicalism and nationalism,’ p.220.

³¹ Keith Robbins. ‘History and Politics: The Career of James Bryce’. In Keith Robbins ed. *Politicians, diplomacy, and war in modern British history*. London; Hambledon Press, 1994. p. 61.

³² Weinroth, ‘Radicalism and nationalism: An increasingly Unstable Equation,’ p. 220.

³³ Fieldhouse, ‘Noel Buxton and A. J. P. Taylor,’ p. 198.

settlement of international disputes by arbitration.”³⁴ Judging by these criteria Buxton fails the test in all, except perhaps the first. His role in the secret diplomacy preceding the Balkan Wars with James Bouchier of the *Times* and his 1914-15 mission in the Balkans, his championing of Balkan Alliance against the Ottoman empire, must have seen as gross violations of radical code.

Internal Politics

Buxton won a seat as a Liberal in a by-election in Whitby in 1905 but lost it in the general election of 1906. In 1910 he was elected for North Norfolk, a seat which he held until 1918. His differences with Lloyd George wing of the Liberal Party over the question of German peace, led him to join the Labor Party and he won back the North Norfolk seat as a Labor candidate in 1922. He became Minister of Agriculture in the first and again in the second Labor Government. Together some other leading Liberal MPs he formed a strong group in Labour Party whose ideas about foreign policy were respected. Buxton, with his brother Charles and the likes of C.P. Trevelyan

fell out with the (Liberal) party in 1914 because of its attitude to the First World War. They soon became major figures in the Pacifist Union of Democratic Control, where they were later joined by Bertrand Russell, Lord Palmerston, and Arthur Ponsonby. From there to membership of Labour Party was a short step, which all had accomplished by the early 1920s. Thereafter, they stood for a proper and pacific foreign policy not dictated by the armaments manufacturers, and for a just and benevolent domestic policy, not dictated by the plutocrats. Significantly, Trevelyan, Palmerston, Ponsonby and the Buxtons were inter-related, were very good friends, and worked closely together. In a real sense, they were to the Labor party what the Salisbury clan were to the Tories: high-minded, austere, prim, and slightly smug. Unlike the Cecils, they were gentry rather than grandees, and their links with middle-class evangelicals meant they were more ridden with guilt than the *habitués* of Hatfield.

³⁴ Morris, *Radicalism against War.*, p. 5. N.3.

But the parallel is close.³⁵

Buxton resigned on the grounds of ill-health in 1930 and was persuaded to take a seat in the House of Lords as one of the few Labor Peers. His wife stood for and won a the House of Commons seat vacated him.

About Buxton one might say, though not without risking an anachronism, that he was a proto-Christian Democrat. Buxton's own early concern was "to connect philanthropy and business activity with Christian ideals' i.e. to promote that social reform in which... Gladstone had so largely submerged Dissent in foreign policy."³⁶ Religion was not necessarily the only driving force but the strongest one in Buxton's thinking. He had strong views "on the social implications of Christianity."³⁷ In his family's breweries he saw the consequences of Victorian liberalism for those less lucky. There he was shocked by the "remoteness between the employers and the workers" which he found "inconsistent with the Christian outlook."³⁸ "Strains of anti-plutocratic Anglicanism" were present in the Buxtons.³⁹ As a historian of the class which the Buxtons belonged recently wrote, the Buxtons were a family "renowned for religion, radicalism, or pacifism" and they had "the landowner's conventional concerns about the dangers of corruption and irresponsible wealth." They were "guilty about their own money, and critical of other people's."⁴⁰ Buxton was a rich man who wanted to clean his conscience by playing goody-goody. He was a member of the great and the good. He was the

³⁵ David Cannadine. *The decline and fall of the British aristocracy*. New Haven, Conn. :Yale University Press,1990. P. 542.

³⁶ Fieldhouse, 'Noel buxton and A. J.P. Taylor,' p. 176

³⁷ Anderson, *Noel Buxton: a life*. p. 26-31, 115.

³⁸ Ibid., p.27.

³⁹ Cowling, Maurice. *The impact of Labour, 1920-1924: the beginning of modern British politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge at the University Press, 1971. p. 28

ultimate grey man of public affairs. Buxton's taste in internal politics was sufficiently against the mainstream to give superficial impression of nonconformity. At the end of the day, though, he generally went along with the consensus he despised.

He condemned himself to the wilderness of the back-benches and contributed to his own political failure by his willingness, or inability, to cultivate any political art except philanthropy. Undoubtedly most of his ambitions in politics remained unfulfilled. He never held a prominent position in the party. His cumulative disappointment in life was more difficult to hide in his looks at a later age.

Orientalism, Ottoman Empire and its Christian subjects

The Orient as a notion and idea in the West derives to a great extent from the impulse not simply to describe, but also to dominate and somehow to defend against it. As a mode of thought and as a means of control of alien societies, 'orientalism' has been mapped out by Edward Said.⁴¹ Orientalism was the servant of imperialism. The incontestable supremacy of Christianity meshed in with theories of race and moral superiority.

Orientalists portrayed Islam as a religion of force and violence,⁴² a religion of the slave trade and forced conversion, as well as of the harem. As an economic entity, the Ottoman empire meant stagnation and backwardness, compared to the progressive and innovative Christian bourgeois world. In social and family terms, it meant slavery, the

⁴⁰ Cannadine, *The decline and fall of the British aristocracy*. p. 542

⁴¹ Edward Said. *Orientalism*. New York : Pantheon Books, 1978.

⁴² "The Turks have never forgotten that they were conquerors. Between them and the conquered there have always been animosity, friction, and misunderstanding; abuses and persecutions." Noel Buxton and

lack of respect for individual human rights and an absolutist and tyrannical state. This was linked to various notions of unbridled sensuality embodied in the harem and the oppression of women.

It was the Harem more than anything that shaped the Ottoman image in the Orientalist and resultant European conscience. In the Mozart's opera, *The Abduction from the seraglio*, for instance, where the Ottoman harem was seen as a symbol of resistance to the values of the Enlightenment and the French revolution. In Victorian England, the Harem was the central symbol of the corrupt degenerateness of the Ottoman Empire, the dark heart of mystery, conspiracy, violence, and sensuality that exemplified Turkey as the 'Other.' For Europeans, the harem was a symbol of Turkish imperium in the sexual sphere. Huge castrated men, usually black, represented a triumph over subject peoples.

An American consular official, writing from Palestine in 1880 wrote:

The Oriental is influenced by selfish motives, in conferring favors and receiving them. Services performed and past are readily forgotten. Only those who know Turkey, and none know the Turks except those who have lived amongst them, can comprehend the extent and applicability of the term intrigue; nor will it be seemed too much to say that the counsels and administration of this government are mainly carried out by this treacherous machinery. Living under a despotic government, under laws framed to screen the authorities rather than protect the people, in a land where might makes right, where justice or judgment rather is bought and sold, the people are suspicious, jealous, cowardly, revengeful and being without education, without commerce, except on a very small scale, and without employment comparatively, they make vice and intrigue and pleasure the business and employment of life.⁴³

Coleman Phillipson. *The question of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles* London : Stevens and Haynes, 1917.p. 248.

⁴³ Salt, *Imperialism, evangelism and the...* p. 19.

It was a formidable list even Mr. Gladstone would have been proud of relating in one his speeches. These people believed that Christian society was democratic, whereas Turkish society was despotic, the antithesis of the values on which Western civilization was based. Westerners thought that in a Muslim society Christians could only be oppressed.⁴⁴ ‘That Asiatic race’, ‘barbarous and uncivilisable race of Tartars’ were holding the Christians in ‘the degrading form of slavery.’⁴⁵ It was “the rule of the barbarian over the civilized,” and “the Turkish night of five hundred years...The Turks were inferior in civilization to the races they subjugated...They were unfit for uncontrolled rule over its Christian subjects.”⁴⁶

In passing judgment on the ‘Turks’, objectivity was a rare commodity. Distance, ignorance, unfamiliarity and fear – most of the elements of the ‘medieval canon’ – had created of them a people who occupied a threatening place in European history. The strength of these beliefs made it possible to portray Islam as an awful accident in the history of mankind. The Orientalists held ‘Islam’ or ‘Mohammedan government’ or the

⁴⁴ “In the Divine scheme of things the Turk was not meant for a ruler.” Noel Buxton. *Europe and the Turks*. p. 63.

⁴⁵ Aubrey Herbert’s view was more nuanced. He criticized people like Buxton because “their policy... was founded on a belief that The Turks were less tolerant than the Eastern Christians, it was certainly founded on a misapprehension. The Turks were inefficient, corrupt and often brutal, but their Imperial system was based—at any rate until the advent of the Young Turks-- on the official recognition of the various churches and on the granting of to those churches a large amount of autonomy. The fanaticism of the Turk is of a mild variety compared with that of most of the Christians.” Aubrey Herbert in his preface to Leland Buxton. *The black sheep of the Balkans*. London: Nisbet, 1920., p. Viii.

⁴⁶ John Macdonald, *Turkey and the Eastern question*, London, T. C. & E. C. Jack, 1913., p.? American news magazine *Atlantic Monthly* wrote in 1913: “There is not, and never has been, any racial or religious basis for a Turkish state in Europe. The Turks belong in Asia Minor. The ability of the Turk to stand in either place without support is doubtful. Administrative decentralization has fostered dishonesty, disobedience, and corruption so long as to make them almost racial traits, which render the Turk poor material for the independent self-government so eagerly desired by the Young Turks. And this very attempt at administrative centralization and honest government rouses the subject peoples and offends the Powers. Only because the Turk was hopelessly inefficient and submissive was he allowed to exist at all. The work of the Committee of Union and Progress, whose ideal is the exclusion of foreigners from Turkey,

supposedly cruel/fanatical/ passive/slothful 'nature' of the Turk responsible for its failings. They failed to investigate and value "the complicated matrix of Ottoman society." The result was a psychological inability to believe that these people were capable of reforming their society in a rational and fair manner. The 'oriental mind' blocked the normal process of history.⁴⁷

It was half-truths and distortions which constituted the bulk of these views. It was true that Christians and Jews were "inevitably considered second-class citizens, in the light of religious revelation as well as by reason of the plain fact that they had been conquered and ruled by the Ottomans."⁴⁸ However, this does not lead logically to the conclusion that they were persecuted for their beliefs or even materially worse off than the Muslim majority.

"The line of basic demarcation ... ran not between Muslim and Christian, Turk and non-Turk but between ruler and ruled, oppressor and oppressed." Those on the top of the social ladder – though, admittedly it was not a ladder which many climbed – "Ottoman civil servants, or army officers, Greek or Armenian bankers or merchants or higher ecclesiastics - (all)looked down on the masses."⁴⁹

In fact Ottoman government gave Christian and Jewish communities recognition, protection and a measure of autonomy, a combination unknown to minorities in Buxton's 'Europe.' Though inequality took many forms, it was not always to the disadvantage of the Christians. The Christians had the protection of as many Courts of Appeal,

settled its ultimate fate. Like Persia and Egypt, Turkey must be governed in the interests of Europe and not in its own. Whatever happens, the Turk will be again reduced to inefficiency and subserviency."

⁴⁷ Salt, *Imperialism, evangelism and the..* p. 20.

⁴⁸ Roderic H. Davison *Reform in the Ottoman Empire 1856-1876*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963., p. 63.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

representatives through which to demand redress as there were Consulates, Agencies and sometimes Embassies.

[Turk] sees with his own eyes the courtyards of the consulates thronged with petitioners and complainants, his own liege subjects, who stand there under a European flag, upon inviolable soil, to pour out their grievances and their accusations against him into sympathetic alien ears.⁵⁰

It was the Muslims who frequently were the victims of bad government. And generally there was no one to whom they could complain. While every other community could, and did appeal to the guardianship and compassion of powerful advocates, the Muslims had no one to look to.

The Christians had many and just grievances. "There were serious deficiencies in the provincial administration. The *bashibozuks*, Ottoman irregulars, were notoriously difficult to control. Roads and communications were poor, and the standard of life in many areas was low. Education was minimal."⁵¹ But as regards to actual hardness Christians were in a better position than the Muslims. They both suffered from the local notables, the tax collectors and misgovernment. But the Christian was often rich enough to bribe the courts, the Muslim could rarely afford that. Christians paid a light tax to escape military service while the Muslim had to suffer the full weight of the military conscription. It was a severe tax when it is remembered how many of those called up never returned.⁵² Christians tended to complain that the military tax symbolized an infringement of their rights and a emblem of their inequality in the eyes of the government, though they were anxious to enjoy the privilege of exemption from the

⁵⁰ H.N. Brailsford, *Macedonia: its races and their future*. New York: Arno Press, 1971. P. 18.

⁵¹ Jeremy Salt. *Imperialism, evangelism and ...*p. 156.

⁵² Jeremy Salt. *Imperialism, evangelism and...* pp. 25-27.

conscription. When attempts were to erase differences, “Christians resented the abolition of their privileges and looked upon a reformed Turkey with a fear, different from their mingled contempt and terror of the old regime.”⁵³

The refrain which Buxton and people like him used, that Christians were somehow worse off than the Muslims, did not totally reflect the truth. It was typical of the Orientalist mind, and Buxton was no exception, to ignore all the underlying complexity of Ottoman society. Evidence to the contrary rarely taken into consideration.⁵⁴ Ethnic and religious groups had lived within Ottoman Empire with reasonable peace and harmony for centuries, though the degree of this harmony may not have been as perfect as we are taught at high school.

The rise of nationalism, the involvement of European powers, the negative effects of revolutionary movements, the process of reform which was slowly transforming the Ottoman state from an essentially Islamic state into a secular one, and the disappointment and disgruntlement it produced in many Muslims; all combined to change the relationship between the ethnic and religious groups in the Empire markedly. The balance between the communities was under strain. Because of the European intervention

The Christians are not better situated but worse, because their oppressor is weak –and for ever reminded of his weakness, angry, suspicious, and afraid – and for ever confirmed in his suspicions.⁵⁵

Revolutionary situations cause a sort of paranoia. The Ottoman authorities and Muslims believed that Christian groups in the Empire were involved in a widespread

⁵³ Aubrey Herbert. *Ben Kerdim, a record of eastern travel*, New York, G. P. Putnam's, 1925. P.289.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 28.

⁵⁵ Brailsford, *Macedonia: its races and their future*. p.20.

conspiracy against the government. Muslim public opinion was accustomed to stories and rumors of uprisings and assassinations by *Komitadjis*. It was only natural that these rumors snowballed when they were traveling from one town or village to another. For Muslims the reference point for most of their daily life was Islam. And Muslim conservatives were determined to keep it that way. They were suspicious of anything that might change it. The attempts of Ottoman reformers, including the Young Turks, were seen in this category and were resisted.⁵⁶ The rise of revolutionary movements among Christians, with autonomy as their aim, and the increasing pressure of European powers were seen as proof of an alarming development.

These habitual judgments was perhaps connected to the presumptions about the Ottomans recycled from centuries of unfavorable history. To those who accepted that the 'Turks', that "grim raw race"⁵⁷ were uncivilisable not to mention "evil, corrupt, despotic and intolerant"⁵⁸ it was all the clearer that the Christians who lived among them were in some type of danger. It was not easy to persuade these kind of people.

In some ways Ottoman Christians were "useful to the ...foreign Governments as blackmail, by which concessions could be wrung from Porte."⁵⁹ Interests of European powers, camouflaged behind the motive of humanitarian involvement and buttressed by the public opinion sympathetic to the 'plight of Ottoman Christians'. Also

⁵⁶ *The Near East*. 'Why the Young Turks failed?' November 22, 1912.

⁵⁷ Macdonald, *Turkey and the Eastern question*, p.87

⁵⁸ David Cannadine. *G.M. Trevelyan : a life in history*. New York : W.W. Norton, 1993. p. 64.

⁵⁹ Herbert. *Ben Kendim, a record of eastern travel*. p. 273. H. N. Brailsford wrote: "[European] intervention is political. In effect and perhaps in intention its sole result is to weaken the Turks, to sap their self-respect, and to hasten the day when the rotting fruit will drop in the mouths of the interested Powers." Brailsford, *Macedonia: its races and their..* p. 19. "It was Europe that consciously and unconsciously, emphasized every difference between creeds and races. It was Europe that, both accidentally and deliberately, was responsible for the catastrophe which befell the unhappy Christian minorities..."

the Ottoman Christians were “willing to be manipulated, seeing in European protection an avenue to greater rights and freedoms and even eventual autonomy or statehood.”⁶⁰ Determined to block the Russians from making further gains at the expense of the Ottoman Empire and buoyed by public sympathy for Ottoman Christians , the British set up a ‘virtual protectorate’ over the eastern Ottoman vilayets. This British campaign did have the effect of encouraging Ottoman Christians to think that European intervention of some kind on their behalf was at least possible. It was, in fact, on the possibility of European intervention that the Macedonian revolutionary movements established in the 1890s and early gambled. The result was a combination of revolutionary provocation, Ottoman reprisal and European (mostly British) intervention.



(missionaries) taught their pupils that, as Christianity was superior to Islam, so were Christians higher and better than Moslems.” Herbert, *Ben Kendum, a record of eastern travel*. P.. 274.

⁶⁰ Salt, *Imperialism, evangelism..*, p. 11.

Chapter Two - Noel Buxton and the Balkan Committee

Buxton founded the Balkan Committee in 1902 to focus public and Government attention on the situation in the Turkish ruled Balkans. Nearly twenty years later he wrote that:

”The Turks were in possession, and nobody could lightly contemplate a policy of removing them and so putting a match of conflagration... we felt that the situation was intolerable and it could not be left unwatched by an organized body. Above all, we were moved by the fact that the subordination of European populations to Asiatic misgovernment was due to the action of our own country at the end of the Russo-Turkish war.”⁶¹

The objects of the Committee were “to educate public opinion in the knowledge that grave responsibilities were incurred by Great Britain in 1878” at the Treaty of Berlin, when she secured the restoration of Macedonia to the rule of Ottoman Empire. Had it not been for English action in 1878, “the whole area of massacre and outrage ... would have been part of a free and prosperous State.”⁶² The Committee also aimed to

“To focus the public opinion by the organization of meetings, and the publication of accurate news as to the state of the country...By means of Press, Parliament, and direct communication with the Foreign Office, to keep before is Majesty’s Government what we believe to be the inflexible attitude of informed English opinion as to the Macedonian question....To promote the interests of all the Balkan States in (Britain), and to encourage travel in those countries and a sympathetic study of their history, customs and institutions.”⁶³

⁶¹ Draft of a speech by Noel Buxton. N.d. Probably for the twentieth anniversary of the Committee.

⁶² Noel Buxton. *Europe and the Turks*. P. 136.

⁶³ Ibid. Pp. 136-7.

However, it was not until the following year that the Committee received general recognition at the time of Macedonian revolt. The not so mild Turkish reaction to the insurrection of the Macedonian Christians rallied a large number of churchmen, journalists, scholars, peers and MPs behind the banner of the Balkan Committee. They were the sort of people who could be described as Gladstonian Liberals. Among this group it became something of a point of honor never to say anything good about the Turks. Though their anti-Ottoman stance was varied in degree and sprang from different sources, the unanimous verdict of this sort of Liberals was that the Ottoman Empire was unreformable⁶⁴. They could not bring themselves to see the Ottoman Empire as any sort of a European state. They made the standard anti-Turkish line their own deeply felt attitude to the complex problem of Balkan nationalities. Aubrey Herbert, a one time member of the Committee, wrote of them in the early 1920s: "These Gladstonians were, above all things, anti-Turk; they supported especially the Bulgarians and the Armenians, not because they imagined, as is sometimes supposed, that these peoples were 'idealists,' but because they knew them to be the most implacable enemies of the Turk; on the same principle they would now be the chief supporters of Greece."⁶⁵

Buxton had picked up a rough working knowledge of the Balkan history with plenty of omission and guesswork. He published many articles in the then most serious journals, *Contemporary Review*, *19th Century and After*, *Fortnightly Review*. Unlike, the

⁶⁴ "no more fallacious principle was ever cherished than the belief that it is possible for Turkey to reform within. Luigi Villari. (ed.) *The Balkan question: the present condition of the Balkans and of European responsibilities*. London: J. Murray, 1905. P. Viii.

⁶⁵ Aubrey Herbert in his 'Preface' to Leland Buxton. *The black sheep of the Bakans*, p. vi. "Few knew anything about anything positive in favour of the Bulgarians, and support for them was largely a reflexion of the hostility towards the Turk." Keith Robbins. 'British Diplomacy and Bulgaria, 1914-15'

Manchester Guardian claimed, however, he did not have “intimate knowledge of the ins and outs of the politics of near East.”⁶⁶ In 1907 he wrote *Europe and the Turks*. It contains elements of historical analysis, but its dominant theme is polemical. It sets out to demonstrate the futility of reformability of the Ottoman Empire from within. For Buxton the essential theme of Balkan history in the previous five hundred years was the struggle between the ‘Ottoman yoke’ and the Christian populations.

There are no Midlothians in Buxton's pattern. His method was to influence the already influential, to do this by the constant submission of memoranda of information and argument, and by the machinery of committee and deputation. The recipients of these memoranda and the deputations were the politically established and the culturally articulate. He had a disposition to believe that “the shape of tomorrow's New order would be very substantially affected by the choices which were made today.”⁶⁷

Even though he had “studied every phase of the Near Eastern Question,”⁶⁸ this seems not to have made him any wiser. For Buxton “the root of the eastern Question is the presence of the Ottoman Turks in Europe, their possession of Constantinople, and their sovereignty as Mohammedan masters over Christian races.”⁶⁹ An English nobleman looked at the Balkans, and what did he see? His view of the Eastern Question was decidedly Manichean which put the all right on one side and all the wrong on the Other. Though he never articulated it, what was hidden in all his writings, with the exception of

in Keith Robbins ed. *Politicians, diplomacy, and war in modern British history*. London: Hambledon Press, 1994., p.215.

⁶⁶ *Manchester Guardian*. ‘Future of Macedonia. Interview with Noel Buxton’ n.d.

⁶⁷ Fieldhouse, ‘Noel Buxton and A. J.P. Taylor,’ pp.186-7.

⁶⁸ *Daily Herald*, ‘Europe’s duty.’ N.d.

⁶⁹ *Christian Commonwealth*. ‘The Turk Must Go: The Real Meaning of the War in the Balkans.’ October 23, 1912.

those written between 1908 and 1912, was the perception which sees the conditions in the Balkans as one more round in the battle between Islam and Christianity. His steady suspicion of Turk's good faith and intentions was a constant thread throughout his all writings.

The strength of the Balkan Committee lay from the beginning in the fact that its members were very well connected in British political life. The letter-head always contained a judicious mixture of Bishops, politicians, journalists, professors, as well as wealthy businessmen. The absolute respectability of the Committee, (as was only proper to any heir to Gladstone's policy) always gave the chairman ready access to the leaders of the British Government. Buxton's "connection with the work of the Balkan Committee has brought (him) the friendship of many Balkan statesmen."⁷⁰ When members of the Committee traveled on the Continent they were received everywhere first by British Ambassadors, then by Foreign Ministers and, in the Balkan states themselves, by the heads of the governments from the Sultan down.⁷¹

Buxton returned to the Balkans in 1904 to witness for himself the existing conditions in Macedonia. The publicity of his efforts led to his being elected to the House of Commons in the following year. There he supported the efforts of Lord Landsdowne, the Conservative Foreign Secretary to impose reforms on Turkey.⁷² At the end of the same year the Balkan Committee proposed "the creation of two distinct autonomous

⁷⁰ Noel Buxton. *With the Bulgarian Staff*, New York, The Macmillan company, 1913. p. Vii.

⁷¹ Vogel, 'Noel Buxton: The Trouble-Maker,' pp.136-8.

⁷² Anderson, *Noel buxton : a life*, pp. 33-6; Conwell-Evans *Foreign policy from...* pp. 3-8.

States, Macedonia and Albania, under the guarantee of all the Great powers, lies the only radical cure for the present anarchy in European Turkey.”⁷³

When Buxton's Liberals came to power at the end of 1905, the Balkan Committee found Sir Edward Grey, the new Foreign Secretary less sympathetic to their concerns than Landsdowne had been⁷⁴. Moreover, in the elections which followed Buxton lost his seat. He must have been one of the few losers among the Liberal MPs in that Liberal landslide.

Grey was so apprehensive of provoking Muslim opinion within the British Empire⁷⁵ that in 1907 the Archbishop of Canterbury personally led a group on behalf of the Balkan Committee to protest at Grey's failure to press for reforms in European Turkey. The revolution of the Young Turks led Buxton and the Committee to support for the time being the efforts at internal reform by the new regime. His differences with the Foreign Office continued after his return to the House in 1910. He began to press for the appeasement of Germany's imperial ambitions. Here he came into conflict with his fellow Radical, Lloyd George, when the then Chancellor Lloyd made his famous speech at the time of the Agadir crisis in 1911.⁷⁶

The Balkan Committee provided Noel Buxton a natural outlet for his essentially enthusiastic talents. Buxton has always had a prodigious sense of his own destiny. And it

⁷³ The *Times*. 14. 12. 1904. ‘Albania and the Balkan Question’; *Daily news* 13. 12. 1904. ‘The Anarchy in Turkey. Albania's claim to Liberty.’

⁷⁴ A. J. P. Taylor, *The trouble makers; dissent over foreign policy, 1792-1939*. London: H. Hamilton, 1957, p. 107.

⁷⁵ Noel Buxton, *Europe and Turks*, pp. 107-8; *British Policy towards the Ottoman Empire, 1908-1914*. , pp. 36-9.

⁷⁶ Anderson, *Noel Buxton: a life*, pp.37-45; Conwell-Evans, *Foreign policy from...* pp. 10-13; Taylor, *The trouble makers; dissent over foreign policy, 1792-1939*. p. 107.

is through the Balkan Committee that he has achieved the recognition he always felt was his due. He claimed that the Balkan Committee "had contributed something to the difficult problems of how far moral principles ought to be applied to foreign politics. The Committee had steadily tried to apply them, not always seeing clearly what the result would be."⁷⁷

The Committee formed a critical link between the Christian subjects of Ottoman Empire and the outside world. They passed what they saw as truth to governments, the press and influential political figures. "The Committee was successful in capturing the public ear."⁷⁸ What the Balkan Committee wanted in Macedonia was based on European supervision and reorganization.⁷⁹ The solution which Buxton and his friends on the Balkan Committee advocated was effective European intervention. Only the threat of concerted force would induce the Sultan to acquiesce in reforms which would include "a European governor, responsible to the powers and armed with complete financial control, and a European gendarmerie."⁸⁰ The watered down version of the scheme implemented in 1903 Murzster program, which designated Russia and Austria as the supervisory authorities, not only failed to pacify Macedonia but left the Ottoman administration essentially intact. The insufficiency of reform was an excitement to further local violence,

⁷⁷ Noel Buxton. Draft of a speech given on the occasion of a dinner given to the members of the Balkan Committee. Also in *Daily News*. June 9, 1909.

⁷⁸ Anderson, *Noel Buxton: a life*. P. 8.

⁷⁹ Noel Buxton. *Europe and the Turks*. Pp. 99-118. Victoria Buxton, 'A history of Turkish reforms since the treaty of Berlin' in Luigi Villari (ed.) *The Balkan question: the present condition of the Balkans and of European responsibilities*. London: J. Murray, 1905. pp. 90-119; Artur Ponsonby, 'The execution of reforms' in Villari (ed). Pp. 331-50.

⁸⁰ F. M. Leventhal. 'H.N. Brailsford and the search for a new international order' in A.J.A. Morris ed. *Edwardian radicalism, 1900-1914 : some aspects of British radicalism*. London ; Boston : Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974. p. 208; Victoria Buxton, 'A history of the turkish..'

the Bulgarian Committee refusing to disband until Europe had substituted international control for Ottoman rule.

Buxton pointed that a method such as had been adopted in Crete might be tried in Macedonia. He gained a favorable impression at Lebanon as a self-governing province, though still part of the Turkish Empire, as contrasted with Syria. He championed European control which he thought

would lead to the disappearance of the armed bands. The reason for was their existence was that there was no police or guarantee of peace. If there could be given any security that a man would be punished for crime the bands would disappear.⁸¹

The Ottomans regarded the fundamental aims of this policy as an infringement of their sovereignty. They found these schemes inappropriate and a threat to the social order. The Ottomans had good reasons for objecting such demands as those of the Balkan Committee. Having achieved autonomy through European pressure, the Christian activists of Balkan provinces would then seek ultimate independence. The more the Ottomans resisted these schemes, the stronger a reference point formed in the minds of Buxton and his friends as to the incapability of the Turks of realizing change, their incapability of granting equality to the 'subject races.' They more frequently thought of Turks that only when constant pressure was applied by morally and materially superior nations would they yield.

For Buxton, James Bryce was one of the three examples he set for himself. He called Bryce "my political father."⁸² Bryce wrote to Buxton privately about the aims

⁸¹ 'Macedonian Crisis', *Manchester guardian*, May 27, 1908.

⁸² Fieldhouse, 'Noel Buxton and A. J. P. Taylor,' p. 176.

of the Committee that there was a “need of getting rid of the Turks”. “I personally want to see the Turkish rule removed out of existence altogether, in Asia as well as in Europe, and the sooner the better.”⁸³ According to James Bryce, the Balkan Committee acted as a body “formed for the sake of awakening and focusing public interest and of supplying accurate information and just views, to a too ignorant public.”⁸⁴ While the main focus in the early years was on the problems of Macedonia, concern over the mistreatment of the Armenian population was also very much of in the minds of Committee members.

With a sympathetic British Foreign Secretary, Like Lord Lansdowne, they had some success. After the Macedonian uprising Lansdowne was sympathetic enough to order a 'naval demonstration', which persuaded the Turkish Government to agree to demands of the Powers to install an international gendarmery in Macedonia and to make a variety of other concessions.

In the Spring of 1904, Buxton was already so confident of the position of the Balkan Committee that he was writing to Lansdowne, on behalf of the “leaders of the Macedonian insurgents”, to ask for the explanations of the Secretary of State's pronouncements in the House of Lords.⁸⁵

⁸³ Fieldhouse., p.180. “Bryce favoured Carlyle’s project of driving the Turk back to Asia.”, F. G. Aflalo, *Regilding the crescent*. London: Martin Secker, 1911. P. 121. Buxton echoed the same sentiment some fifteen years later: “Turkey has been found grievously wanting. Her presence in Europe has not provided a benefit either to herself or to anyone else. What with her misgovernment, her maladministration, her downright incompetence in all matters of polity, her aversion from European civilization, it would be in the general interest that she would cease to be a European Power occupying such an important position between the East and the West. Between the European and the Musulman conceptions of law and government there is an irreconcilable antagonism. Islam is stationary and opposed to progress; its idea of a State is a warlike theocracy, a religious fundamentalism.” Noel Buxton and Coleman Phillipson. *The question of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles*.p. 248.

⁸⁴ Bryce to Noel Buxton. July 1903. Quoted in Fieldhouse, ‘Noel Buxton and A.J.P. Taylor,’ p. 182.

⁸⁵ Fieldhouse, p.182.

His friends were grateful to him for being the person he was. In 1909, in a dinner given by the members of the Committee in his honor, he was told by the members that “the formation of the Committee was due to his initiative, and its continuance to his perseverance.”⁸⁶ His ability of organisation and leadership by example was well captured in a newspaper article: “the work of the Committee had been a triumph not only for his personal zeal, but also for his tact and leadership. He had the capacity for...evoking the utmost energy and self-sacrifice in others.”⁸⁷ Speakers praised Buxton's loyalty to the oppressed Macedonians which had been

“constant as it had been unselfish... He spent his time, his money, his labours, and his influence to one end. He founded the Balkan Committee, and largely kept it active, he traveled again and again to desolated provinces, he interviewed multitudes of people, he negotiated, he kept the Press alert, and Ambassadors awake... His splendid chivalry has added a new lustre to a name which for a century has stood for the highest and purest enthusiasms of British philanthropy.”⁸⁸

The radical journalist H. N. Brailsford saw in Buxton “the representative of an older tradition. And from his energy and persistence, and his power of gathering others round him, I learned that this tradition was not effete.”⁸⁹

The Ottoman rulers, and the Young Turks were no exception, closely monitored the repercussions of their diplomatic moves amongst the British public opinion. Buxton's papers contains dozens of letters from Ottoman diplomatic representatives in London which expressed their respect and disappointment about , say, the latest Balkan

⁸⁶ Daily News. June 9. 1909.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

Committee resolutions condemning the Porte. The ones sent by the Charge at the Ottoman Embassy in London, Djavad, were exceedingly interesting⁹⁰

The members of the Balkan Committee were the sort of people who had a fondness for crusades. A new member of the Committee Scott Holland wrote to Buxton for instance: "I am delighted to join you in your conspiracy against the Turk."⁹¹ They should be blamed for being content with a very one-sided attitude towards a complex issue. Most of them were landed amateurs who were already losing their grips on the parliamentary liberal Party.

The weakness of the Committee was obvious in some ways. No one on the Committee wanted to overthrow the Liberal Government which had been elected in 1905 and which after all represented the Party which Buxton and many members of the Committee belonged.⁹² They did of course object to the whole 'imperialist' wing of the Party which was that of Grey and Asquith.⁹³ But their main aim was to persuade Grey of the rightness of their policy. They were, therefore, entirely dependent on persuading the

⁹⁰ Djavad to Noel Buxton, July 3 1911; October 12, 1912.

⁹¹ Fieldhouse, 'Noel Buxton and A.J.P. Taylor,' p. 180.

⁹² Though, by no means all the members of the Balkan Committee were Liberals. G. K. Chesterton, the ultimate conservative, though he was very critical of the attitude of Buxton towards Young Turk regime, was another active member. The famous author of *Father Brown* was very critical of the credit given to the Young Turks by Buxton and his friends. He protested the British Liberals who condemned Italian aggression against Turkey in North Africa: "Turkey is what she is, a convinced and unrepentant oppressor, the foe of small nations and Christian ethics, the living presence in Europe of that worst poison out of the East, the barbaric idea of Empire. If anyone still thinks that the Young Turks have altered this... they have not. Their triumph has been marked chiefly by torture in the prisons, assassination in the streets, and massacre in the provinces.... for my part I would as soon be ripped up by an elderly Turk as by young one. ..Turkey is oppressing his Christian subjects...he has always done it, and never given the faintest indication of any intention to leave off." *Daily News*. 'Letter to the Editor: Turkey and the Liberals.' 1911. N.d..

⁹³ "The younger ...element in the Liberal leadership – Rosebery, Haldane, Grey and Asquith – in varying degrees favoured imperialism...Why, they asked themselves, should they be impeded by memories of Gladstone's doubts, or the Quaker intransigence of Bright, or the uncompromising isolationism of Cobden?" A.J.A Morris, *Radicalism against War, 1908-1914*, p. 4. Buxton, though he was against this group, at least shared their interventionist outlook.

Foreign Office and finally the British cabinet to act on their behalf. As such actions would have necessitated a major shift in the British policy towards the other Powers. Most British Foreign Ministers, even when they were Labour Ministers, were reluctant to undertake this.

The Young Turks

Balkan Committee, like “the British Foreign Office was taken unawares by the Young Turk Revolution”⁹⁴ After the revolution Pacifists, idealists and others had flocked from all over Europe “to see the vulture turn into dove of peace... Of foreigners the British were the most popular (with the Turks) beyond comparison.”⁹⁵ “For a brief space, the millennium seemed to have dawned in the Near east.”⁹⁶ Buxton was one of those many sympathizers whom the revolution had gained for Turkey in Western Europe. It was a great but guarded enthusiasm. “Even those who doubted whether the Young Turk leopard could change the old Turk spots, thought that the Young Turks should be given a chance.”⁹⁷ H N. Brailsford wrote to Buxton::

The new situation robs us, while it continues, of this pretext for interfering. So long as Christians are not being killed or maltreated or denied elementary justice, through the fault of a feeble or culpable government, I don't think we have moral right to interfere. I assume, in all that follows, that the

⁹⁴ Hasan Unal. *British Response to the Young Turk Revolution, The First Year, 1908-9: A reassessment* .p. 3.

⁹⁵ Aubrey Herbert. Ben Kendim, a record of eastern travel, p. 257.

⁹⁶ Henry Wickham Steed. *Through thirty years, 1892-1922, a personal narrative*. New York: Doubleday, 1924., p.278.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 279. For the British public reaction to the revolution see An Eye-Witness. "Constantinople at the Declaration of the Constitution." *Fortnightly Review*, 1908. pp. 563-70; Dillon, E. J. "The Unforeseen Happens as Usual" *Contemporary Review*, 1908 pp. 364-84; Angus Hamilton. "Turkey: The Old Regime and the New." *The Fortnightly Review*, LXXXIV (1908):369-82.

Young Turks keep their word about assuring equal conditions to Moslems & Christians. if they don't, they deserve no consideration... Home Rule for Macedonia...I no longer wish to see it by diplomacy or force.⁹⁸

Buxton spent nearly three weeks in Constantinople ("this hitherto blood-stained city")⁹⁹ after the revolution. He was entertained a dinner by Kamil Pasha¹⁰⁰ and was received by Abdulhamid. He barely suppressed his irritation when he met the Sultan.¹⁰¹ But he found the Sheik-ul Islam, who assured Buxton that "the ulema were well satisfied with the manner in which the idea of constitutional government was being received throughout the empire,"¹⁰² amiable. He was also present at the opening of the Turkish Parliament.¹⁰³

He asked: "may we hope that these people are capable of order and peace, or are we deceived?"¹⁰⁴ The advice he received from the Europeans who lived in the city that "the Oriental is instructable, that whatever impression the stranger forms is certainly wrong"¹⁰⁵ is closely parallel the one given by Lord Cromer to Edward Grey:

if it is important to know what an oriental is going to do, you must ask yourself three questions (1) what would you yourself do under

⁹⁸ Leventhal, F.M. 'H.N. Brailsford and the search for a new international order.' . 210.

⁹⁹ Noel Buxton. 'The Young Turks,' p. 16.

¹⁰⁰ Although he seems not to be aware of it, he was the source of some minor quarrel among the Young Turks. Feroz Ahmad. *Ittihat ve Terakki, 1908-1914*. Istanbul : Kaynak ,1986, pp. 64-5. Grey instructed British ambassador Lowther to warn Buxton to abstain from mixing up "...in any differences between any section of the Young Turks." Hasan Unal, *British Response to the Young Turk Revolution..* '. pp. 49-50.

¹⁰¹ Buxton was an ardent opponent of the Hamidian regime. He portrayed as the devil incarnate. "Hamidian system involved--universal fear; stagnation of industry; in private life arbitrary persecution; ignorance cultivated as a desirable end ; control of public life by the worst and stupidest men; blackmail through torture; government by a clique whose skill lay in playing on the Sovereign's fears, and whose weapons were exile and oubliette; incompetence and cruelty erected into a system." Noel Buxton. 'The Young Turks,' p. 17.

¹⁰² *Daily News*. 'A mission to Turkey. Cordial Reception of the Balkan Committee.' December 8, 1908.

¹⁰³ Noel Buxton. *Travels and reflections*. Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin company, 1929. pp. 65-74.

¹⁰⁴ Noel Buxton. 'The Young Turks,' p. 17.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

the same conditions? (2) what do you think the wisest man you know would do? (3) what do you think the oriental would do? When you have answered these three questions you will know three things that the oriental certainly would not do"¹⁰⁶

However, he felt that his visit was an “undoubted success.” The Young Turks “spared no pains in making us familiar with their work.” Young Turks played to his vanity, and not surprisingly, succeeded. If these Young Turks could invite him to Constantinople and entertain him, talk about the latest fashionable subjects on the dinner table, so perhaps they were not that Asiatic after all. Young Turks “made on all us an extremely favorable impression.” They were, it seemed to Buxton, “very anxious to keep the friendship of constitutional elements abroad in order to get support.” Buxton was exceedingly delighted to hear that the Balkan Committee’s “agitation greatly aided them in stirring up their fellow Turks to active revolution.” “By chance,” he wrote, borrowing the eternal Eastern Question cliché, “we put our money in the right horse.” When asked what were the noticeable qualities of reformers, Buxton replied; “public spirit, modesty and common sense.” “These men appear to be at once practical and principled, restrained, frank, of invariable good sense, not self-seeking, in the proper sense patriotic.”¹⁰⁷ Enver was the “Garibaldi of today.”¹⁰⁸

He defined the rule of the Young Turk Committee as “a kind of despotism by consent, a Government by benevolent advice.” He explained the anomaly of how it was that no one seemed to believe in the Young Turks before the revolution, by the necessity

¹⁰⁶ Quoted in Jeremy Salt. *Imperialism, evangelism..* p 18.

¹⁰⁷ Noel Buxton. ‘The Young Turks,’ p..16.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 20.

of working in “complete secrecy.”¹⁰⁹ They “conspired to save their country from moral and economic ruin and political dismemberment. ...men of original character.”¹¹⁰

It was a rare moment when Buxton chose to be positive about the Turks. Buxton agreed to ease the pressure of the Balkan Committee, though with some considerable reluctance. Buxton's overture to Young Turks may have been made on tactical grounds but it was not wholly insincere. At the end of the journey he made this interesting discovery: “The Turk’s laziness and stupidity are *not* so great as people thought”¹¹¹

This positive attitude towards the Young Turk party continued till 1912 but it remained an isolated period in the career of Buxton. Then again he stuck to the old reliables: ‘Asiatic mind, unreformable Turk...’ But in fairness to Buxton this commitment to the Young Turks was generous and complete. Was he sincere or just being flattered by them? Whether it was simply that he could not resist their boyish charm is not clear.

The British Ambassador in Constantinople, Lowther, approved this support. He wrote to Buxton (17 March, 1911)

I think we must be very patient with the Young Turks. We must not expect immediate reform, but I find they resent very much the mostly criticism or advice, although they would do all they could to conceal from you any resentment. But I fear their protestations of equal treatment for all has so far not gone very much beyond words. But perhaps when it is the Government that governs we may see a change for the better. Most fair-minded Turks must admit that the comments of the Balkan Committee have been characterized by extreme fairness.”¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ *Eastern Press*. December 29, 1908. ‘Why England is Popular in Turkey.’ In fact, “the Bulgarian Internal Organization served as a model for the machinery of the Young Turks (sic) Party.” Angus Hamilton. *Problems of the Middle East*. London: Eveleigh Nash, 1909., p. 18. For the details of this parallel see E. E. Ramsaur. *Jonturkler ve 1908 ihtilali*. Istanbul: Sander, 1972., pp. 120-2; Charles Roden Buxton. *Turkey in Revolution*. Unwin, 1909., p. 48.

¹¹⁰ Noel Buxton. ‘The Young Turks,’ p. 16

¹¹¹ Noel Buxton to his father. Quoted in Anderson, p. 38.

¹¹² Conwell-Evans, *Foreign policy from...*, p. 25.

Buxton was happy in his role as the friend of the Young Turks. But this change of policy was by no means a departure from his deep-seated anti-Turkishness. He was as if collecting fuel afterwards. Buxton praised the Young Turks for abandoning Abdulhamid's policy of "(keeping) open the old sore caused by the hatred between the different sections of the Christians." He gave them credit for reverting to this policy "which empires are prone, namely, that of stimulating divisions among their subjects and making profit out of them." He was hopeful because "Parliament existed as a Parliament, and served as a safety valve for grievances."¹¹³ He found it important that there were newspapers owned by non-Muslims that could criticize the Government. There was "no better alternative than the present government." The Young Turks were "conscious of great inexperience. ... This makes them hesitate to move quickly and inclines them to a policy of delay."¹¹⁴

The energy of British moral support for the revolution had created "a dangerous expectation of material help"¹¹⁵ Being unsatisfied this expectation led to souring of relations between the countries. CUP wanted to retain the friendship of England at this stage. Buxton warned Grey that CUP should not "regard this friendship secure under all circumstances...the aid of England should be cordial and active... but not absolutely unconditional."¹¹⁶

It is essential that the eyes of the Young Turks should be kept upon England. They are inclined now, to use a slang phrase, to play up to England... (W)e may keep them in this state of mind, which forms the necessary influence in their reforming ambition.¹¹⁷

¹¹³ Newspaper clipping. (no name). 'Impressions of Young Turkey.' 7.3. 1911.

¹¹⁴ Draft of a memorandum from Noel Buxton to Grey. December 1908.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

Maybe the Young Turks can be criticized for unleashing expectations that neither them nor anyone else could satisfy. It should have been clear to the Young Turks that Macedonia could not be denied some sort of autonomy and remain governable. But perhaps this requires a little bit more charitable view of their vision and competence than they actually possessed.

The very reforms which have undoubtedly marked the Young Turks' regime have inevitably tended to consolidate the various Christian races in opposition to the Government.

Abdul Hamid was content to play off one race against the other, allowing many privileges and favors to each alternatively. The Young Turks, on the other hand it must be borne in mind, are before all things, Ottomans. That is to say, they have from the first set before themselves the idea of unifying and, so to speak, standardization of administration.¹¹⁸

Young Turks, Buxton wrote, were “extremely impatient of those exemptions based on religious or racial differences which the laxity of the old regime tended to foster. It is therefore easy to understand how it comes about that their rule is resented, notwithstanding its obvious merits.”¹¹⁹ Buxton stressed the clash between the Young Turk conception of education and the Greek one. Young Turks were “endeavoring to establish some sort of control over the system of education, some inspection system such as existed in every civilized world.” On the other hand, Greeks who “had for some time exercised a complete autonomy and freedom in regard to their schools, where not only religion had

¹¹⁸ *Manchester Guardian*. ‘The Young Turks' problem.’ June 1910

¹¹⁹ *Ibid*.

been taught but patriotism,” had some misgivings about this new development.¹²⁰ It was not only Christians who resented Young Turk reforms. At the heart of their reforms was the principle of absolute equality between all Ottomans, regardless of religious or ethnic background. Conservative Muslims found this difficult to accept..

According to Buxton the heavy-handed approach of young Turks led to the drawing together of different sections of Ottoman Christians, especially Greeks and Bulgarians. He found this development interesting because these two groups were not on good terms previously.

By 1911 Buxton began to turn sour about the Young Turks but he hesitated to withdraw his support. What an appalling prospect it will be to start up again.

President of the Robert College in Constantinople, complained to Buxton about the CUP who “have a tendency to make everything Turkish.”¹²¹ Buxton criticized the methods of the Committee of Union and Progress for their harshness in suppressing the Albanian revolt.¹²² He held the Salonica branch of the Party responsible for the hard line policies and helped their critics in the Party to make their voice heard in the British Press.¹²³ Buxton thought that their failure lay in their embracing of “French ideals of

¹²⁰ *Daily News*. ‘Turkish Revival. Mr. Buxton on need for British Friendship.’ 7.3. 1911

¹²¹ C. J. Gates to Noel Buxton. 23 February 1911. As aside, Buxton admired American educational and relief work in the Balkans. “Educational work in the Balkans is almost entirely American. It is a common saying that the Bulgarian nation was educated at Robert College, Constantinople, an American institution. When the question of relief work has been involved, although the money came mainly from England, it has been chiefly distributed by Americans, through the schools and missions..” *The New York American*. July 16 1911.

¹²² *Spectator*, 12. 8. 1911; *Daily Telegraph*, 2. 8. 1911; *Liverpool Post*, 1. 8. 1911.

¹²³ *Irish Times*, ‘The Young Turks.’ 28.7. 1911. Here Buxton published a letter by Riza Tewfik Bey, who denounced the “arrogant and despotic attitude of the certain members of the Selonica Committee.”

centralization and uniformity.”¹²⁴ These could have worked in Asiatic Turkey, he thought, but they are totally inapplicable to the European provinces. He denounced

the systematic destruction of Christian races and the substitution for them of Mussulman immigrants from Bosnia, the Caucasus, and Turkestan (to Albania which) was debated and as the British Government well knows was deliberately resolved at the secret congress of the Salonika Committee.¹²⁵

He warned in July that “unless the conciliatory party in Turkey keeps the upper hand, active intervention (by the powers) may result.”¹²⁶ “Their numbers were too few to deal with the mass of bigoted feeling opposed to them; their difficulties destroyed their nerve.” Buxton believed that “a more fortunate diplomatic situation and an attitude of conditional friendship on the part of the British Embassy might have kept them in the reforming mood.”¹²⁷ He accused the British government for being “rather too cold, rather too critical towards Turks, and too reluctant to give them credit for the good they had done.”¹²⁸ He regretted British officials coolness towards the new regime in Turkey. He thought that “the fault lies less with the Foreign office than with the Embassy at Constantinople...The Young Turks have been apparently looked down as a set of upstart radicals.”¹²⁹ British ambassador Lowther, for instance, thought that CUP was “just a collection of good-intentioned children.”¹³⁰

¹²⁴ *Manchester Guardian*. ‘Future of Macedonia. Interview with Noel Buxton.’ N.d. *Daily Herald*. n.d. ‘Europe’s duty’.

¹²⁵ Newspaper clipping. (No name, n.d). ‘Turkish severity in Albania.’

¹²⁶ *The New York American*. July 16 1911.

¹²⁷ *Manchester Guardian*. ‘Future of Macedonia. Interview with Noel Buxton.’ N.d. For the approach of British Embassy to the Young Turk regime see. Heller, *British policy...*, pp. 23-8, 104-7.

¹²⁸ *Daily Chronicle* . 7.3. 1911; *Westminster Gazette*. 7.3. 1911.

¹²⁹ *Manchester Guardian*. ‘The Young Turks’ problem.’ June 1910.

¹³⁰ Unal, ‘British Response...’ p. 45.

Buxton sensed a “lingering distrust between... the Turks and the Christians in European Turkey. Up to now the Revolution had led to no sort of drawing together between the Turkish and Christian sections of the population.”¹³¹ He asked Grey “whether he will 'arrange that His Majesty's vice-consuls in Macedonia and Armenia shall during this year make extensive travels among the villages of their districts, in order to report fully upon any disorders that may occur.”¹³²

After various abortive efforts, the Balkan States succeeded in 1912 in reaching an agreement among themselves to fight the Ottoman Empire. Suddenly the Young Turk regime looked less promising. “the anti-Turkish Press of England was acrimonious and didactic. The banks of Europe were closed against the Young Turks.”¹³³

The Balkan Wars

The remaining reservations that Buxton and his fellow radicals might have felt at deserting the Turks were swept away in the passions engendered by war. Buxton declared “reform from within having failed.” He called it “a melancholy ending to the episode of Young Turkish reform.” He went on to claim that

(European provinces) have been, as leading Young Turks have admitted to me, a supreme problem and difficulty... (and) not to speak of a financial loss...The position of Turkey would be far stronger and, for the first time, secure without them. A Turkey... (with) absolute authority in the European provinces has no friends.¹³⁴

¹³¹ *Daily Chronicle* . 7.3. 1911.

¹³² Newspaper clipping. (The *Times*?). 28 February 1911.

¹³³ Herbert, *Ben Kendim, a record of eastern travel*. P. 296.

¹³⁴ *Londonnery Sentinel*. ‘Reform of Turkey's European provinces. Mr. Noel Buxton's views.’ 17/10/1912.

“In a few weeks the swift strokes of the rebel armies achieved more than had decades of pained hopes and futile diplomatic negotiations.”¹³⁵ The war would lead to the “expulsion of the Turk from Europe, ‘bag and baggage’, as Gladstone had desired and demanded. Lloyd George hailed the allied victory because “the boundaries of freedom and good government will be extended.”¹³⁶ Ottoman rule in Europe,

a system of gross barbarism and cruelty... maladministration, corrupt officials, illegal taxation the absence of justice between Christian and Mohammedan, the failure to punish crime, with the consequent danger to property, and especially to the honour of women¹³⁷

came to an end. The choice as he saw it was between the continuation of Ottoman Empire as a 'cancer' between East and West; or the “blossoming of European values in the heart of Near East.”

Balkan Committee member, *The Times*’ Balkan correspondent and Buxton’s close friend, James Bouchier¹³⁸, played a decisive role in the formation of the Balkan League against the Ottoman Empire. He made it possible for the Bulgarian and Greek prime ministers to meet secretly.¹³⁹ Buxton was informed of these secret negotiations by Bouchier.¹⁴⁰ Unlike Buxton, Bouchier was skeptical of the Young Turks from the beginning. He wrote to Buxton in late 1909: “Question of nationalities in Turkey, which

¹³⁵ Morris, *Radicalism against War, 1908-1914*, p. 350.

¹³⁶ Ibid., p. 351.

¹³⁷ *The Westminster Gazette*. ‘After San Stefano.’ 9. 10. 1912.

¹³⁸ The *Times* correspondent James Bouchier, who in the words of a Bulgarian diplomatist’s wife, was “Bulgaria’s staunchest champion in her days of misfortune, devoted years of journalistic activity to his Balkan friends, and win their eternal gratitude” Anna Stanchova. *Recollections of a Bulgarian diplomatist’s wife*. London: Hutchinson, n.d. p32.

¹³⁹ Steed, *Through thirty years, 1892-1922, a personal narrative*, p. 360; Grogan, E.F.B. *The life of J. D. Bouchier*. London; Hurst and Blackett, 1926. pp. 134-43. “Venizelos accredited Bouchier with having played a major part in making possible the Greco-Bulgarian treaty of 1912 before the First Balkan war,” Curtright, *Muddle, indecision, and setback..* p. 99.

¹⁴⁰ “The Greco-Bulgarian Entente is ...perhaps the only safeguard against the policy of Ottomanization.” Bouchier to Buxton. April 1912.

the Young Turks are not approaching in the right way, will prove an insuperable obstacle to their program...They are imitating the ways of their cousins, the Magyars, in their government of Macedonia, trying to Turcize everything and everyone.”¹⁴¹

In late 1912, in the first Balkan War, when Balkan countries had been more successful than he dared to hope, and when the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire was imminent, nothing less than the partition of the Ottoman Empire would have pleased him now. The Balkan Committee was “under pretense of humanitarian reasons... preaching a Crusade in England against Turkey.”¹⁴² The result of the war had been a signal triumph for the Gladstonian Turcophobes who demanded the destruction of the Ottoman Empire. The members of the Balkan Committee “after being reproached for many years by the Conservative Press as dupes and sentimentalists... suddenly found their policy adopted by the Governments (and) carried out with a thoroughness almost exceeding their wildest dreams in the past.”¹⁴³

Our Man in Sofia: 1914-15 Balkan Mission

After the outbreak of war with Germany, there was still the question of which side Turkey and Bulgaria would take. Buxton felt that he could persuade the Bulgars not to join the Central Powers, perhaps even to come in on the Allied side. In 1914 the support Buxton with his brother Charles received from the Cabinet for their proposed mission from Lloyd George and Churchill encouraged him in this endeavor. Churchill enabled them to go ahead with their project. Lloyd George was in favor of making the mission

¹⁴¹ Bouchier to Noel Buxton. December 11, 1909.

¹⁴² Djevad to Noel Buxton. 2 October 1912.

official. Grey, however, was less enthusiastic than them and somewhat more hesitant. He neither “trusted the Buxton's judgment nor was he willing to sacrifice Foreign Office control.”¹⁴⁴

Buxton possessed considerable reserves of stubbornness. During this Bulgarian mission they were wholly on display.¹⁴⁵ It was in connection with his plans of 1914-5 to bring Bulgaria into the war on the Allied side that he and his friends expressly asserted their claim to special knowledge of, and special influence in, the Balkans, and “virtually put themselves forward as an alternative Foreign office with respect to the Balkans.”¹⁴⁶

Buxton believed that “the forces of the Balkans, if united, are equal to the force of a great power.”¹⁴⁷ If Balkan states could be induced to enter the War on the Entente side it will shorten the war. However, the claims of Balkan states over others' territory were not easy to harmonize. What Buxtons advocated was a formal joint declaration by the Entente Powers, that, in return for friendly neutrality towards Serbia and Romania and undertaking to oppose Turkey if the latter declared war against the Allies, the Entente would support Bulgaria's claim to the half of Macedonia as indicated in the Serbo-Bulgarian treaty of 1912.¹⁴⁸

The Buxtons arrival in Sofia was a major event and, although the pro-Austrian Government had had little to do with the pro-Entente diplomats for some time, they were warmly received by King Ferdinand, met with the Bulgarian prime minister

¹⁴³ Aubrey Herbert in his ‘Preface’ to Leland Buxton. *The black sheep of the Balkans.*, p. vii.

¹⁴⁴ Lynn-Curtright, *Muddle, indecision.*, p. 23

¹⁴⁵ Anderson, *Noel buxton; a life*, pp. 62-71.

¹⁴⁶ Fieldhouse, ‘Noel buxton and A.J.P. Taylor,’ p.182.

¹⁴⁷ Noel Buxton, and Charles Roden Buxton. *The war and the Balkans*. London: Allen & Unwin, 1915. p. 17.

¹⁴⁸ Lynn-Curtright, *Muddle, indecision.*, p. 39.

and addressed the parliament in Sofia.¹⁴⁹ Nevertheless they departed empty handed.¹⁵⁰ During this mission, when they were in Bucharest, they were the target of an assassination attempt by a Turkish secret service agent, Hasan Tahsin, who was later immortalized as the first man who shot against the Greeks on the day of the invasion of the Izmir in 1919. Both of the Buxtons were wounded.¹⁵¹

After he returned to England, Buxton met with Lloyd George in January 1915. Buxton reiterated his belief that “all the Balkan states could be brought into the war on the side of the Entente”. The insecurity of the Balkan nations about their borders and perhaps the resultant fluidity of these borders let Buxton devise a scheme which would, he hoped, enable Bulgaria to take the Entente side.¹⁵² His plan¹⁵³ was as follows:

Bulgaria	Bulgn. Macedonia to the Vardar river including Monastir, but leaving Uskub to Servia. As much of Thrace up to& including Constantinople as she can get. Possibly Kavala.
Servia	Bosnia, herzegovinia, a strip of the Dalmatian Coast.
Roumania	Transylvania, & perhaps other minor rectifications.
Greece	Southern Albania, Rhodes & other islands ?Cyprus ?Smryna and a strip of coast with the immediate hinterland ¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁹ Lynn-Curtright, *Muddle, indecision.* ,p. 36; Vogel, ‘Noel Buxton: The Trouble-Maker,’ p. 138-40.

¹⁵⁰ Lynn-Curtright, *Muddle, indecision.* , p. 36.

¹⁵¹ Anderson, *Noel Buxton: a life*, pp. 66-9 ; Grogan, *Life of J.D. Bouchier*, p. 162.

¹⁵² “The difference which distinguishes the south-eastern corner from the rest of the continent is that in that region men do not look upon their frontiers and future of their nation, even the existence of their nation, as something established and secure...(M)en still feel wholly uncertain as to the frontiers which their country will ultimately possess. Serbs, for instance, have long been doubtful, whether their expansion will be toward the Adriatic or the Aegean. The Greeks do not know whether their center of gravity will be in Europe or in Asia.” Noel Buxton and Charles Roden Buxton. *The war and the Balkans*. London, Allen & Unwin, 1915. Pp. 11-12.

¹⁵³ Lynn-Curtright, *Muddle..*, pp.95-6

¹⁵⁴ “To satisfy finally and completely the national aspirations of the Hellenic race by including a portion of Asia Minor in the kingdom of Greece.” Buxton, Noel and Charles Roden Buxton. *The war and the Balkans.* . P. 67. Though “annexation of the whole coast-line would be an unreasonable aspiration,” Buxton is happy with the “annexation to Greece of the country drained by the rivers running to Aegean... with Smryna as its center.” P. 106.

To give up Kavala

It was an interesting plan by any standards¹⁵⁵. Buxton must have enjoyed himself playing on the map like a child, giving this to that, drawing the boundaries with his expensive stick.¹⁵⁶ Rhodes at the time belonged to Italy. Buxton did not explain how to convince Italy, whom 'the Entente would be unlikely to risk because they hoped to gain her as ally. Cyprus was more interesting. And, though the British had got used to offering territory that did not belong to them, Buxton was asking them to cede something of their own.

The Foreign Office in general and Edward Grey in particular, perhaps wisely, were not wholly convinced by Buxton's displays of knowledge of the 'facts on the ground' and cold shouldered the initiative. Grey treated the Buxtons with a coldness bordering on contempt. For him Balkan Committee was a "collection of busybodies and nobodies."¹⁵⁷ Buxton's relation with the top British diplomat in Sofia were also far from perfect.¹⁵⁸ The Bulgarian King Ferdinand was also unimpressed. He believed, like the

¹⁵⁵ The degree of influence of the part of this plan on Ottoman lands on the post-War partition of Anatolia is difficult to establish. But probably it was Buxton who first wrote about giving Adana region to the Italians. Ibid. P. 109.

¹⁵⁶ "It would be right on the grounds of nationality that a Turkish state should be left, after the districts in which Turks are not a majority have been allotted to their true possessors. Justice, in fact, demands that, the provinces of Broussa (sic), Konia, Angora, and Kastamuni should constitute a Turkish Kingdom. No part of the coast of Asia minor is markedly Turkish, but the suggested State should have an outlet on the sea. Such an outlet would be found in the Gulf of Ismid, the Marmora port of Broussa, the ancient capital." Ibid. Pp. 110-1.

¹⁵⁷ Heller, *British policy towards...*, p. 19. N. 48.

¹⁵⁸ Noel Buxton to Cecil. (draft of a memorandum). June 1915; Noel Buxton to Harcourt. 28 October, 1914; Keith Robbins. 'British Diplomacy and Bulgaria, 1914-15' in Keith Robbins ed. *Politicians, diplomacy, and war in modern British history*. London; Hambledon Press, 1994. p. 221.

Young Turks, that Germany would win the war.¹⁵⁹ He refused the Buxtons' semi-official offers politely, but used them against the Germans and the Ottomans to extract more concessions.¹⁶⁰ Bulgarian interests were on the German side because they did not want to fight against the Ottomans. Also, they could not bring themselves to trust the Greeks and Serbians with whom they had unhappy memories from the Second Balkan War¹⁶¹. The justice Bulgaria wanted concerning its claims in Macedonia "could be granted by the Central Powers largely at the expense of their enemies, while for the Allies it could only be done at the expense of their friends."¹⁶² But Buxton refused to give up. It was obvious that he would fail. Still, his was a good show. At this stage he was ,if not finished, at least quite consumed.

Another Liberal duo, who supported the independence of the Balkan nations, George Macauley Trevelyan and Robert Seton Watson, were also touring the Balkans. However,

they lacked many of the faults which so marred the Buxtons' abilities to correctly assess the situation in the Balkan states. They were less blinded by their prejudices and preconceptions, they were not overly pro-Bulgarian, and they were far more pragmatic in their search for the best means of serving Britain's interests in that corner of Europe.¹⁶³

E.D. Morel, the famous peace activist, criticized Buxton for his efforts to drag Bulgaria into the war:

you urge that 1.300.000 more males should be flung into inferno
(with all the attendant and incidental miseries which the non-fighting
population of those states will suffer) because you think that their sacrifice

¹⁵⁹ Fieldhouse, 'Noel Buxton and A.J.P. Taylor,' p. 182.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 183.

¹⁶¹ Edward Haskell to Noel Buxton. September 16, 1914.

¹⁶² Robbins. 'British Diplomacy and Bulgaria, 1914-15,' p.38.

¹⁶³ Curtright, *Muddle, indecision, and setback..* pp. 96-7.

now will prevent further and larger sacrifices of human life later... you could not assume the immense moral responsibility involved in urging such a course of action.”¹⁶⁴

The plan's greatest blunder was its gross violation of the principle of self-determination. Serbia was willing to surrender Bulgarian Macedonia only if allowed to 'carve up' Austria; Greece would bury the hatchet with Bulgaria only if allowed to expand in Asia; Roumania ceding territory to Bulgaria if allowed 'to smash' the Magyars; Russia would yield up Bessarabia in return for – what? – Constantinople.¹⁶⁵ Self-determination was the greatest victim of Buxton's plan.

It did not occur to him that he had started his Balkan Committee in an attempt to prevent the continuous violence in the region but that by 1914 he was haggling over bits of territory in a fashion similar to the governments he so readily criticized.¹⁶⁶

But people like Buxton did not really think much about nations and nationalism as much as they would like others to believe. They murmured things like the “plurality of nations freely coexisting and mutually benefiting one another,”¹⁶⁷ but this were far from clear. Bryce for instance, believed that “small peoples could, indeed should, be absorbed

¹⁶⁴ E. D. Morel to Noel Buxton. Quoted in Fieldouse, 'Noel Buxton and..' p. 185.

¹⁶⁵ Buxton wrote a book about the future of Constantinople and the Straits during the war with an international lawyer. It seems much of the book was written by the lawyer, Coleman Philippon. In that book authors discuss various possibilities for Constantinople after the war. Various plans suggested for solving the Straits problem Constantinople to be handed over to Russia; a free port under the Russian flag; placed under Bulgarian rule; Constantinople and district to be established as an autonomous State, whose civil administration to be in the hands of local Greek population, and the military guardianship to be temporarily in the hands of the United States; to be a free town and under the collective guarantee of Powers; as for the Straits, freedom of passage to be granted to all vessels of all nations, Turkish control remaining; the Straits to be handed over to Russia; the Bosphorus to be given to Russia, and the Dardanelles to another Power ;the Black Sea to be made a Russian lake the Straits to be internationalised, and a regime similar that of the Suez canal or the Panama Canal to be set up. Noel Buxton and Coleman Phillipson. *The question of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles* London : Stevens and Haynes, 1917.

¹⁶⁶ Vogel, 'Noel Buxton..' p. 140.

¹⁶⁷ Weinroth. 'Radicalism and nationalism: An increasingly Unstable Equation'. pp. 223.

into larger units, but they could not be coerced into unity.”¹⁶⁸ “In adopting ‘one or another of the different races for a favorite pet,’¹⁶⁹ their Liberalism periodically victim of their partiality... This in turn caused friction among the radicals themselves whenever national movements came into conflict.”¹⁷⁰

The whole expedition did represent the closest that this particular 'trouble maker' would ever come to conducting his own foreign policy. Buxton's and Balkan Committee's relations with the Foreign Office were not perfect. Balkan Committee “advocated such policies with righteous indignation about the inactivity of others which naturally made them a source of enormous irritation to foreign ministers generally, including, on occasion, the British one.”¹⁷¹ While Buxton's dealings with Grey had left “an impression of amateurishness”¹⁷² on the former, Grey's attitude to Buxton changed from conflict to indifference to boredom. When the Committee felt that their advice had not been regarded, or even wanted, to the Balkan Committee, this was the final demonstration of the incompetence of the Foreign Office.¹⁷³ Echoing the views of his brother, Charles Roden Buxton dismissed the “small aristocratic clique which dominates the foreign office.”¹⁷⁴ A British diplomat found Buxton as “an amiable nincompoop”¹⁷⁵

¹⁶⁸ Keith Robbins. ‘History and Politics: The Career of James Bryce’. In Keith Robbins ed. *Politicians, diplomacy, and war in modern British history*. London; Hambledon Press, 1994. p. 61.

¹⁶⁹ “in those Days every little State in the near East had its British patrons.” G. P. Gooch in Anderson, *Noel Buxton: a life*. P. 6..

¹⁷⁰ Weinroth. ‘Radicalism and nationalism: An increasingly Unstable Equation’, p. 220.

¹⁷¹ Vogel, ‘Noel Buxton..’ p. 138.

¹⁷² Fieldhouse, “Noel Buxton and A.J.P. Taylor,” p. 182.

¹⁷³ Ibid., p. 183. Buxton complained about Grey and Foreign Office attitude to another high level diplomat: “the tradition of short-sighted circumspection which weighs small risks and ignores great ones and of unwillingness to risk rebuff however light.” Buxton to Cecil. June 1915.

¹⁷⁴ A.J. A. Morris. *The scaremongers : the advocacy of war and rearmament 1896-1914*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984. p. 360

¹⁷⁵ Robbins, ‘British Diplomacy,’ p. 222.

and another “intelligent ass.” It is a fair bet that Grey would subscribe to only half of these propositions and it was not difficult to guess which half it would be.

It is hard to imagine Noel Buxton in office. What kind of Foreign minister would he have made? Would he have changed, or continue in his Wilsonian poses? His ideas about foreign policy were never tested by the duties of the office. He was, in a sense, 'uncorrupted by the duties of office.' He could mutter endlessly without feeling any responsibility about the likely consequences of his 'schemes', and 'plans' on the relative position of his country's standing in Europe. He was stronger on diagnosis than on cure. He was correct for instance that “the Balkan problem was of all the world’s problems, the most likely cause of war,”¹⁷⁶ but he could not see that Balkan wars, which he championed, perhaps, were the most important catalyst to the Great War.

The single-mindedness of the Committee made it very difficult for its members to appreciate the tremendous complications of the problems faced by the Powers in the Balkans, as well as everywhere else. The very idea that there was connection between, for example, British policy towards Germany and British policy towards the Ottoman Empire seemed to men like Buxton inherently wicked. However that made them incapable of fathoming many of the intricacies of foreign policy , even within Balkan peninsula. Certainly there was a good deal of groundless optimism in the Committee's view of what was likely to happen in the Balkans, and little understanding of the broader issues involved.

In the final analysis of course the Balkan Committee could find no real solution to

¹⁷⁶ Noel Buxton, *With the Bulgarian Staff*. P. 132.

the Balkan problems. Throughout the period in which Buxton was first its chairman and then its President, the Committee advocated Balkan unity and national self-determination, clearly both seductive but also obviously incompatible. Of course this terrible contradiction remains one of the basic dilemmas of the twentieth century for which neither the Balkan Committee nor anyone else has yet found a solution.

“A number of Radicals were pacifists, though the majority more by sentiment than conviction.”¹⁷⁷ There is a militarist struggling to get out in every pacifist, and for Buxton this happened during the Balkan wars. He justified this war because without it “the traditional threat of Turkey” would persist and Turkey “would not leave Europe without bloodshed.”¹⁷⁸ For Buxton, the Balkan War was “the most economic and...the most just war.”¹⁷⁹ He tirelessly glorified the virtues of Bulgarian soldiers.¹⁸⁰ He praised the Bulgarians for being “heart and soul at work for the war.” However about the soldiers of Adrianople “there was not even a grudging praise”¹⁸¹ neither from Buxton nor from the British press. Buxton either could not or would not apply the same ethical standards to Balkan regimes that he applied to Ottoman Empire.

After the First Balkan War Buxton wrote that the Christian Balkan states “should not be deprived of the fruits of their victories.”¹⁸² He claimed that “any district which should be restored to Turkish rule would be not only beyond the possibility of

¹⁷⁷ Ibid. P. 6.

¹⁷⁸ *Norwich Eastern Daily Press*. December 18, 1912. ‘Mr. Noel Buxton on the war. What Turkey should cede.’

¹⁷⁹ Noel Buxton. *With the Bulgarian Staff*, p. 163.

¹⁸⁰ *Morning Post*. ‘With the Bulgarian Army.’ 17.12. 1912.

¹⁸¹ Aubrey Herbert, *Ben Kerdim*, p. 297.

¹⁸² Noel Buxton. *With the Bulgarian Staff*. P. 123.

rehabilitation, but would suffer ...vengeance”¹⁸³. What Buxton says, though he is probably not aware of it, is that 'I have seen immense miseries inflicted by the conquering armies upon the Muslims, and, if by the pressure the Great Powers, the lands recently conquered are given back to Muslims, they will be so angry that the Christian population may suffer some revanche'.

For him the Bulgarian army was “perhaps the finest fighting instrument the world can show.”¹⁸⁴ He gave credit to the “rapidity and persistence of allies.” The victory was “swift and decisive” and the Balkan Christians “accomplished a feat of arms (of) which even the greatest Power would be proud.”¹⁸⁵ It is a pity that they were all from a man whom has been known as a 'renowned pacifist' and for whom there is entry in the *Biographical Dictionary of Modern Peace Leaders*¹⁸⁶. He was very short of writing poems about the 'shining armour.'

Impartiality

He could not be justifiably regarded as an impartial observer. And this was not un-noticed by his critics. He was always ready to believe what any Christian told him about the Turks. These stories were nearly always in conformity with the prearranged myth held in his mind which comprehended an image of the Turk as the "barbarian". Turks and Muslims were the 'usual suspects' in his books. He had a natural disposition to believe the worst of them. He shied away from giving the benefit of the doubt to any Turkish claims.

¹⁸³ *Norwich Eastern Daily Press*. December 18, 1912. 'Mr. Noel Buxton on the war. What Turkey should cede.'

¹⁸⁴ *Yorkshire Observer*. December 4, 1912. 'The Bulgarian Soldier. Impressions of Mr. Noel Buxton.'

¹⁸⁵ Newspaper clipping (no name). December 7, 1912. 'Letter from the battlefield'.

He refused to be critical and did not develop a filter through which to assess the reliability of what was reported to him.¹⁸⁷ His view of 'the Turk' was lacking in charity. When 'chronicling' the atrocities committed by 'the Turk' his concern for evidence and truth were easily sacrificed. When he talked about evidence it was hardly overwhelming. In fact, most of the time there was little evidence at all. Gossip, rumors, assertions by none other than Christians passed as evidence. The poverty of his 'objectivity' is evident in the Balkan Committee report he wrote in 1911 on the 'Condition of Macedonia': "The evidence on which the Balkan Committee rely is derived, as it always had been, not merely from sources friendly to the victims, but from Europeans resident in various parts of Turkey, and they know it to be trustworthy..."¹⁸⁸ So when 'establishing facts', he did not take the trouble to ask the view of the 'Other' side but was merely content with that of 'trustworthy' Europeans. There were others who took this trouble and they reveal an altogether different picture. A consul in Sarajevo wrote: "outrages committed by Christians had been 'as hideous as those committed by the Mussulmans, but which, as the Turks... have thought it more dignified to revenge than to complain, had had no chroniclers."¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁶ Donald S. Birn. 'Noel Buxton'. *Biographical Dictionary of Modern Peace Leaders*. Edited by Harold Josephson. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985. pp. 132-3.

¹⁸⁷ In the Buxton papers I found a hand written copy of a letter written by a German diplomat, Marschall von Buber. This letter was published in *Die grosse Politik der Europäischen Kabinette*, vol. xxv. p. 426. "Church circles regard the Mussulmans as... wolves and the Christians as innocent lambs. So they have learned. And famous Balkan Committee would collapse like a house of cards if the Turk got act. For this reason, its lead(sic) Mr Buxton, whom I got to know at the Hague, believes everything that Bulgarians tell him. That Oriental Christians, especially when they give their word of honour, would tell an untruth is to him unthinkable. The church circles and the Balkan Committee are very influential factors, with which every English Cabinet has to reckon." Marschall von Buber, April 22, 1909. The activities of the Balkan Committee were closely monitored by the German press and not always without doubt and anxiety. *Osmanischer Lloyd*. various newscippings. N.d.

¹⁸⁸ *Near East*. 'The Condition of Macedonia. Manifesto by Balkan Committee. 'March 28 1911.

¹⁸⁹ David Ayerst. *Guardian: biography of a newspaper*. London: Collins, 1971. p. 194

Buxton suppressed uncomfortable truths about the Christian behavior towards the Muslims. He was a revered apologist for the Christian wrong-doing in the Balkans. And he earned the reputation of being reluctant to acknowledge Bulgarian misdeeds. He had a considerable ability to persuade himself of the rightness of any view he chose to hold.

During the Balkan War, for instance, when he was *With the Bulgarian General Staff*¹⁹⁰, he left the question why Muslims were fleeing eastwards unanswered. He wrote about the “immense sacrifices by the allies” but not about the suffering brought to the Muslims though he “was able to visit many places beyond the reach of military attaches”¹⁹¹ and so was able to observe the agony of the fleeing Muslim population. “Mosques that had sheltered only women and children were blown up; .. komitadjis had raped, robbed and put whole villages to the sword.”¹⁹² Buxton and Europe had heard of these things. But about the atrocities committed against the Muslims, even when they were reported, the Buxton had nothing to say. One sometimes gets the impression that as if he found impartiality as an irritating burden. “After the Turkish refugees came the komitadjis, undisciplined bands of Bulgarian freebooters, who swept over the country.”¹⁹³ This is the most Buxton could say. For the rest he leaves it to your imagination what those Komitadjis did to the fleeing Turkish and Pomak Muslims. When he wrote his experiences in the district of Drama and Gumurjina (Gumulcine). “This country, which is mainly agricultural and is inhabited chiefly by Turks and Pomaks, who are Bulgarian

¹⁹⁰ Noel Buxton. *With the Bulgarian staff*. New York, The Macmillan company, 1913.

¹⁹¹ *Norwich Eastern Daily Press*. December 18, 1912. ‘Mr. Noel Buxton on the war. What Turkey should cede.’

¹⁹² Aubrey Herbert, *Ben Kendim*, p. 300.

¹⁹³ Newspaper clipping. ‘Rev. Buxton and the War Victims.’ n.d. 1912.

Mohammedans."¹⁹⁴ If its 'chiefly inhabited by Turks and Pomaks,' then why the Bulgarian army was there? Where is the principle of self-determination? If 'Asiatic mind' has no right to rule over European Christians, then why was Buxton silent over the occupation of Muslim land by Christian soldiers? 'Double-standards' is the only answer one can find.

He, perhaps 'understandably' avoided unveiling such matters. But the cumulative effect of these silences is to cast doubt on his sincerity and objectivity when he makes bigger statements. He shied away from employing his far from ordinary powers of organization, campaigning and lobbying in the service of the truth. Criticism of the Committee's activities came not only from the Foreign Office but also from Dissenters with other pre-occupations. On January 10, 1913, Aubrey Herbert resigned from the Committee on the ground that

I have, for some time in the past, been out of sympathy with the partisan attitude of the Balkan Committee, which favored the Bulgarian at the expense of the Greek and Moslem inhabitants in Macedonia. ...the Servians have massacred Albanians wholesale (and) that Bulgarian Committees are exterminating the Moslem women & children in Macedonia with the object of establishing a claim to inherit the land...the least your committee could do... is to declare your disapproval of such... savagery, before passing resolutions which deal with apportionment of the spoil & the inheritance of the murdered'.¹⁹⁵

It was not that he was incapable of being analytical. His writings on Germany¹⁹⁶, the need to end the war¹⁹⁷, his elaborate reform schemes on the conditions of agricultural

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Fieldhouse, 'Noel Buxton and A.J.P. Taylor,' p. 181., n.2.

¹⁹⁶ Anderson, *Noel Buxton: a life*, pp. 73-85; Conwell-Evans, *Foreign policy from..* pp. 37-87.

¹⁹⁷ Anderson, *Noel Buxton: a life* pp. 86-114; Conwell-Evans, *Foreign policy from..* pp. 116-155; Fieldhouse, 'Noel Buxton and A.J.P. Taylor,' pp.187-97.

workers¹⁹⁸ witnessed a not inconsiderable talent of thorough and subtle thinking. But when it came to 'the Turk' and 'his Asiatic mind' they all deserted him. He never spared derogatory adjectives for the Turks and the Ottoman Empire. His books are irritatingly repetitious and dull in new ways. Seldom was any attempt made to distinguish the particular from the general. Without them the world would be a less dull place. To a genre, Balkan travelogue, in which British writers used to excel, his contributions were negligible.

His whole life was an exercise in selective philanthropy. Buxton was delighted in the fact that he was a good philanthropist. In his adopted role as the publicist for the Balkan nations he was totally comfortable. He was a mixture of pomposity, civility and strong conviction. "Doing something" for the Christian subjects of Turkey was his constant preoccupation. And not that he did not have a notion of what that 'something' was. The problem was that it was continuously changing under the pressure of circumstances. At different times it was autonomy under Ottoman rule, unification with Bulgaria, being part of an all-embracing Balkan federation, and no less than downright independence. Buxton thought that the European Powers should intervene in the Balkans militarily. "It would have no more been war than the action of policeman in the street."¹⁹⁹

To echo Samuel Johnson, perhaps one could say that about the Balkans "he seems to have but one idea and that was a wrong one." On many subjects his views were blurred, on others transitional, and on some they were plain wrong. Those on the Ottoman Empire were mostly in the last category. In the Buxtonian scheme of the world, one

¹⁹⁸ Anderson, *Noel Buxton: a life*, pp. 115-124.

¹⁹⁹ *Daily Herald*. 'Europe's duty.' N.d.

sometimes wonders that nearly all the evil in the world, in some way or another, was related to that 'Asiatic race', the Turks. When it came to the Ottoman Empire, the supposedly British quality of fairness, seemed to desert him. He was rarely able to write about the Turk with anything other than scarcely concealed contempt. Buxton was more a Victorian than an Edwardian and by 1915 'Victorian' was as pejorative a word as 'Prussian.'

Buxton was oblivious and indifferent to the presence of Muslims in the Ottoman state except in so far they appeared as menaces and dangers to the security, well-being and aspirations of the Christians. It meant that he was unable to see or admit that many of the problems he created so much noise and fuss about were also the problem of the Muslims, if not shouldered more by them. He did not even try to understand the problems of Ottoman reformers. He made no allowances for the difficulties of introducing change into a society with diverse and complex problems. He preferred to mock the intentions of the reformers. He thought those efforts at reforming were entirely to fool the European powers.

Buxton had a busy correspondence with the Consuls and missionaries in the Ottoman Empire. As the missionaries were one of the principal channels of information reaching the outside world about the conditions of the Christians, especially in Anatolia, their own biases had a significant effect on the shaping of public opinion. They were generally silent about atrocities committed against the Muslims. The Ottomans had all the right to doubt the sincerity of these Western humanitarians and their governments. They wondered whether Muslim blood was less precious than Christian.

Buxton came to see the Ottoman Empire as resembling some strange society out of science fiction, a world much like his own in general appearance, but with some of the rules changed or removed. And he saw Turks not so much as real people, but as caricatures, only badly drawn. The demonic view of Islam and the gross stereotypes that still prevailed about the 'Turkish character' or the 'oriental mind' made it possible for Buxton to remove the Ottomans from the normal process of history. They enabled him to present the Turks as Gladstone did, as if the Turks were almost a separate species, governed by different instincts and uniquely brutal and cruel. 'The Turk' he portrayed was not very dissimilar to aliens from the outer space and they were certainly not *E.T.* s.



CONCLUSION

Was Buxton an insider masquerading as a 'troublemaker'? As the subtitle of a biography of him indicated, he was a back-bench politician, whose influence on policy was indirect. He was befriended by many of the leading politicians, diplomats, journalists, historians and churchmen of the day and he has corresponded extensively with them. Noel Buxton had an inflated sense of his place in English politics and foreign policy. But was he of any consequence? His was a vocal voice, with access to the newspapers and semi-scholarly popular journals. Though he apparently always wrote with the clear assumption that his opinion could make a difference, as to the British policy towards the Ottoman Empire before the First World War, he was hardly a factor. It was the Anglo-Russian convention of 1907, and Grey's insistence on sustaining it were the decisive factors²⁰⁰ behind the deteriorating relations between the Ottoman Empire and Britain, and not the vocal denunciation of Ottomans by Buxton and the Balkan Committee. As a Dire Straits song said "the dice were loaded from the start". However, the Young Turks, perhaps influenced by the visibility of Buxton and his friends in the British Press, attached disproportionate importance to their reports, resolutions and speeches, as an index of British policy.

Noel Buxton was not the first man to discover that Turkey-bashing is a secure way to pose as a true Liberal. Like many rich men before and since, Buxton hankered after a more influential role. To misquote what A J P Taylor wrote for Northcliffe, Buxton 'aspired for power instead of influence, and in the end forfeited both.' All his

work could be subtitled 'why I hate Asiatic mind and how to erase them from the west of Angora.' In criticizing the Ottoman practices, he sometimes lost all sense of proportion. Most of his arguments broke down because they were not finely shaded. He failed to appreciate the uniqueness of the Ottoman Empire.

He saw philanthropy as politics, as personal fulfillment, as occupation, as a religious good-deed. But his philanthropy was very selective and this casts very grave and just suspicions on the sincerity of his motives. He prided himself with being "suspicious of sensational appeals.., cautious." He claimed to abhor sentimentality.²⁰¹ But this argument cannot stand closer scrutiny of his writings and correspondence.

He was very conscious of his image. He even employed a newspaper-clipping service to inform him about what newspapers wrote about him. He enjoyed being admired for his expertise in Balkan affairs.

To misquote what Lytton Strachey wrote about Thomas Arnold, Buxton's mind was, perhaps, duller than it should have been. This paper might be criticized for being bereft of ideas. But, perhaps, some part of the blame can be apportioned to Noel Buxton. Although this thesis is supposed to be about ideas of him, he did not have many. Turkish race has never lacked eloquent opponents in the West. Buxton was not one of them. 'The Turk' in his books collects a series of uncompromising judgments. It would be an understatement to say that he did not like the Turks. He hated them. His anti-Ottomanism was too vulgar to defy analysis. His one-sided interpretations were rarely supported by evidence. What he called evidence of Turkish brutality was mostly faulty and at best

²⁰⁰ Heller. *British policy towards..*, pp. 158-63.

²⁰¹ Noel Buxton, *Europe and the Turk*, p. 5

anecdotal. All his works are a catalogue of his prejudices written in awful prose. He was a philanthropist pretending to be a politician. But his compassionate sentiments never crossed the Bosphorus. His judgments about Turkey were formed by biased and artificial readings of already biased Orientalist works. What he wished was, to borrow from Cold War jargon, to *roll back* the frontiers of the Ottoman Empire, the *evil Empire*, that is.

Noel Buxton has now slipped into the memory hole of history though there is still a Foundation which is mostly intact which bears its name. There is no doubt that Noel Buxton is an important footnote in the history of Turco-British relations and even a more important one for early twentieth century British foreign policy towards the Balkan peninsula.²⁰² He exemplified a biased approach to the Ottoman Empire. In more than one instance he saw something other than a barbaric abyss in the Turkish mind, but they remained isolated episodes.

²⁰² Lloyd George hailed him as "the greatest authority on the Balkans in the House of Commons."
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