



James David Bourchier

Period and Area of activity at TCD: 1870-1871 Bourchier was born in Limerick and studied at Trinity College Dublin.



Bourchier, from Anglo-Irish stock in Bruff, Co Limerick, was the London Times correspondent in the Balkans and became the staunchest and most faithful friend Bulgaria ever had, in the words of his biographer, Lady Elinor Grogan. Bourchier was no ordinary journalist, but a champion of Bulgaria's cause even after it sided with Germany in the first World War. Bourchier went to Trinity College Dublin, where he won a gold medal in classics, and this led him to King's College, Cambridge, where he again excelled in Latin and Greek, winning seventh place in his class.

Since 1888, Bourchier covered events in Bulgaria and the Balkans. He was much more than a reporter. He was a defender of Bulgarian interests and insisted that Bulgaria and the Balkans had significance outside those deemed important. But he also maintained it was possible to be an impartial journalist while recognizing the rightness of a cause. Bulgaria and the Balkans were seen as pivotal to the stability of Europe. It was this that made Bourchier so influential. 'He was our real Ambassador.' Politicians, diplomats and the foreign office officials in London read his reports from the Balkans. Everybody in the Near East know that he was the most potent influence there - consulted by Kings and Ministers, and able to influence, even control all European opinion. (TP O'Connor, Sunday Times, January 9th, 1921) He also wrote the sections on Greece, Romania and Bulgaria for Encyclopaedia Britannica. Remaining impartial, he was still able to identify with the aspirations of the people, to the extent that he was able to act as a secret mediator between governments. Bourchier covered the two Balkan Wars as well as the First World War. He worked tirelessly to get Bulgaria to enter the war on the side of the allies. Following World War One, Bulgaria was not represented at the treaty negotiations. Bourchier acted as an unofficial representative. He argued that Bulgaria was only a belligerent because of its unfulfilled national destiny, the integration of all Bulgarian people. Robert Kaplan, in *Balkan Ghost*, compares Bourchier's role to that of T. E. Lawrence, Lawrence of Arabia.

Bourchier's championing of small nations was not unique, though his understanding with the Bulgarian peasantry was. His knowledge of Bulgarian and Greek, his understanding of traditions would indicate more than a fashionable obsession with the Other. It could well be that his Irishness, and being an outsider, allowed him a different and very non-English view of the Balkans, permitting him to see the world through the eyes of others. His view was not just romantic, but also political, in terms of independence, liberty and democracy, and also cultural.

Long before Said's *Orientalism* and the postcolonial agenda to be established in western universities, Bourchier has proven to be an Irishman by defending a small "dark" Balkan nation from the Great Powers and the British Empire, his employer.

The 1983 The Times Correspondent Reporting from Sofia is a collection of Bourchier's articles. In Sofia there is Bourchier Boulevard, a plaque, a brand of cigarettes, a set of stamps. In his home country, where he is little known. Still, the first Irish Ambassador to be resident in Sofia, Mr Geoffrey Keating has organised a number of events around Bourchier.