

# The Last Days of Belgrade

as published in *The Carthusian* ~ December 1915

*with commentary by Dr. Eric Webb*

*During the Great War The Carthusian, the magazine of my old school Charterhouse, published a number of letters from 'old boys', most of them in fact no older than their early 20's, describing their wartime experiences.*

*All of these are of the greatest interest, as eye-witness accounts of history in the making, but one in particular, published in December 1915, stands out. The writer T.R.F. Butler was a non-combatant, a Southern Irishman serving as a volunteer orderly at a Red Cross hospital in the Serbian capital Belgrade. He describes his experiences as the city fell to the invading Austro-German armies that October, and over the following fortnight as the hospital team fled southwards, heading for Salonica in neutral Greece.*

*Butler's account is reproduced below as it originally appeared. In the paper which follows I attempt to set it in context, both biographically and historically.*

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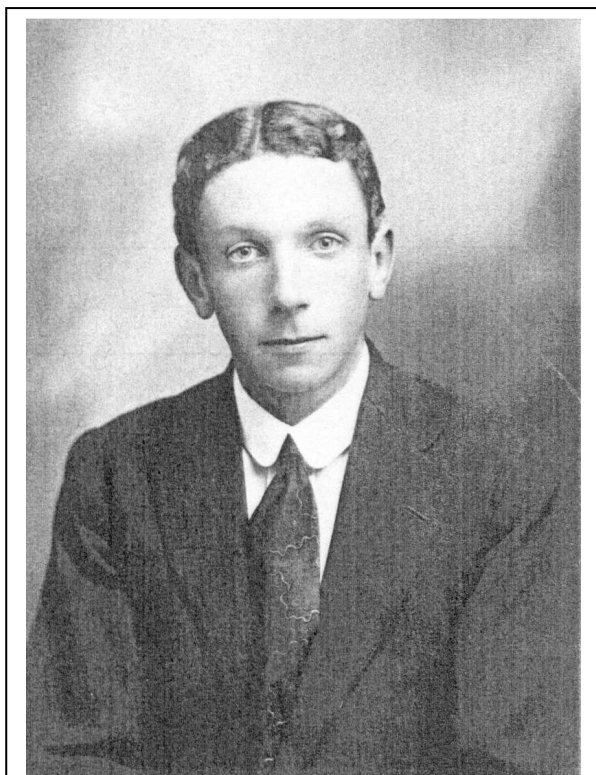
I do not think that you have hitherto published any war article from the Serbian front. As it was my fortune to be in Belgrade at the time when the great Austro-German advance began, and thus to have witnessed one of the fiercest bombardments of the whole war, I am sending you this and hope it may prove of interest to your readers.

About two o'clock on the afternoon of Tuesday, October 5<sup>th</sup>, several of us were standing on the steps of our hospital (the British Eastern Auxiliary), watching a large enemy aeroplane that was hovering over the city. It had evidently come for the purpose of reconnoitring, and, though repeatedly fired at, showed no inclination to depart. "This" said a friend of mine to me, "means an air-raid or a bombardment tomorrow." I was somewhat sceptical, and replied that we had seen aeroplanes over Belgrade before without anything remarkable ensuing. "And there are said to be German troops in Semlin" (the Austrian frontier town facing Belgrade), he continued. "They will be moved to the Italian front in a few days," I answered, "as the last batch in Semlin were."

Late that same evening a desultory cannonade began, but none of us paid serious attention to it. By the next morning it had grown more fierce, and by the time we had finished attending to our outpatients, one of our nurses remarked to me that the Austrians really meant business this time. I still believed that we were quite safe in Belgrade, and most of the population shared in my belief: we thought that the mines laid down in the river would protect us, and though for some time past it had been conceivable that the enemy would attempt to force a passage before the winter floods came on, no one ever imagined that they would bring their troops across right in face of Belgrade.

It had been generally supposed that they would attempt a double crossing near Ostronitsa (to the west, on the Sava), and near Semendria (to the east, on the Danube) and thus

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T.R.F. Butler in 1913

endeavour to cut Belgrade off. The first disquieting news we received was that the only gun of any size defending Belgrade - the gun in the Fort, manned by a party of Russian sailors - had been put out of action. By the evening Belgrade was being bombarded in grim earnest. Up to the present most of the shells had fallen either in the river or on the quays; but it was not long before the enemy began to put them indiscriminately into the town.

We had been dressing shrapnel-wounds in the hospital for some time, and late that evening a crowd of about seventy refugees appeared at our doors. They told us that they lived in the lower part of the town, and that their homes had probably been destroyed by this time: at anyrate it would be certain death to go back to them. We found accommodation for them in our cellars, where some remained for thirty-six hours, and provided them with bread, soup, &c. Some time that night the first batch of Austro-Germans succeeded in crossing near the Fort, and by next

morning all the islands, except Big Cigalia on the Sava, had been wrested from the Serbians.

The bombardment was steadily growing fiercer, but we were too busy with our wounded to pay much attention to it. During that day the enemy made crossings at various points, both on the Sava and on the Danube. They sent their men across in open boats, cut adrift from Semlin, and let them force a landing wherever they could. All our mines had been exploded by their shells, and presently Austrian monitors came down the river and started shelling the town. Damage enough had already been done by their heavy howitzers. One of our sailors afterwards told me that two of our guns had to face twenty-eight enemy guns, including four howitzers, and, in addition to these, the monitors on the river. I can testify that they did their work well in spite of these odds, and lent immeasurable aid to the Serbian resistance.

In the late afternoon an aeroplane came over and dropped some bombs, so that we were now attacked by land, water and air. Several big fires broke out, one in a building quite close to our hospital. Shrapnel had fallen in our yard on several occasions. The other English unit in Belgrade (the British Farmers' Hospital) had evacuated their building some time before. As they were not far from the Danube quays, they were in a very perilous position and several of their staff had received injuries. Most of them had gone out into the country and, I believe, spent the night in the ditches: a few had come to seek shelter under our roof.

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Before long we had a taste of machine-gun fire, and the sound of this was far more disconcerting than anything we had hitherto experienced. With the fall of Big Cigalia, which enabled a large body of troops to get across the Sava, the capture of the city seemed imminent. Moreover the enemy had succeeded in laying a pontoon over the Danube at Kara Burmi, I think it was, two miles to the east of Belgrade.

By the morning of the 8<sup>th</sup> it was pretty clear that we must either evacuate our hospital or be taken prisoners. The Serbian Government had invested the chief doctor of the American Hospital, Dr. Ryan, with full powers as Consul, and he had told us that he would send stretcher-bearers to remove our patients when it became absolutely necessary for us to depart. There was still some faint hope that the city might be saved, as drafts of Serbian troops were pouring in; but they were wholly inadequate to meet the immense numbers of the enemy, who now occupied the quays and part of the lower town.

That afternoon I went out to see if it was possible to procure a wagon to transport some of our medical stores, but by this time there were none to be had. Refugees had been leaving the city ever since morning, and by the afternoon there was a fairly continuous stream moving southward. As I was returning from my unsuccessful quest, several old women besought me by unmistakable gestures not to go back into the town. Civilians and gendarmes were lying wounded in the streets; we brought in as many as we could and attended to them.

About six o'clock stretcher-bearers arrived with Dr. Ryan's orders to convey our patients to the American hospital, and a little later the doctor himself came and said that we must depart on the instant. We had only one tiny cart, which could hold little more than two heavy boxes containing provisions in case of need, so that we were compelled to leave behind everything beyond what we could carry. Just before we left a grocer's shop in close proximity to our hospital was wrecked by a shell, and our walls had been struck by stray rifle-bullets from time to time. Street-fighting had been in progress for several hours in the lower quarters of the town, and the Serbians were commencing to throw a barricade across the lower end of the main street.

A few minutes later we found ourselves among an immense throng of refugees the whole city, one might say, in retreat moving along the one road that could lead them to safety. The spectacle was the most melancholy that I have ever witnessed. One saw old women struggling along as best they could under heavy burdens and usually there were ill clad, crying children following along behind them. There were wounded soldiers too in groups of three or four, often supporting each other for the order had been given that every wounded man who could walk must do so, as it was feared that the only remaining hospital, the American, might become overcrowded.

Some days before the bombardment began we had taken into our hospital a Serbian captain suffering from pleurisy - a charming man, for whom everybody had a good word. He had left us earlier in the day, although we knew that he was far from cured, and I was delighted to find him at Torlak when we arrived there, looking well too, considering the circumstances.

The night was pitch dark and rain was falling intermittently: moreover, the sides of the road were deep in mud, owing to the recent heavy rainfall and the primitive manner in which all Serbian roads are constructed. The wealthier inhabitants of the town were

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leaving in carts or bullock wagons and as these occupied the greater part of the road the column of those retreating on foot was frequently swept aside into the ditch in order to let troops pass.

Under such difficult conditions of travelling, it took us several hours to reach the heights of Tortlak, though the distance was not much above six miles. When we looked back we could see Belgrade burning in seven different places. Most of the refugees camped there for the night around roadside fires: they were pitifully cold and wet, and we knew that next day they must push on many miles further. Yet, in so far as we could see, none of them complained: all displayed that heroic spirit of endurance which is characteristic of every Serbian, and which has led their army to offer almost superhuman resistance to the overpowering forces of their enemies.

We were fortunate in finding a motor-lorry belonging to the British Naval Mission waiting at Tortlak. Into this we crowded as best we could, and after travelling all night we reached Mladnovatz next morning. Several times it required the combined efforts of all in the lorry (nurses included) to extricate it from the mud in which it threatened to become engulfed. From Mladnovatz we travelled by rail to Chuprija in open trucks, among a crowd of other refugees. We moved from there to Nish. There the whole town had been decorated for some days in honour of the French troops supposed to be arriving.

When I read of the fall of Nish the other day, the thought of those decorations occurred to me. The Serbian people are as kindly and long-suffering as any in the world; but who can blame them if they feel embittered at the irony of those decorations? We offered our services to the Serbian Government at Chuprija, Nish and Uskub, and hoped at least to be able to attach ourselves to some other unit; but we had lost all our stores, and in the general turmoil that prevailed, no one would accept the extra responsibility of taking us on. Accordingly, there was nothing left for us but to return home.

We hoped, when we arrived home, that it would be possible for us shortly to return to Serbia with another hospital unit; but, under present conditions, it seems very doubtful if any more will be sent out.

T. R. F. BUTLER.

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### Note on Slav Spelling

I have essayed to be consistent from one instance of a place or personal name to the next, but beyond that I have followed my sources. Hence some names are transliterated, *eg.* Mladnovatz, others use Slav orthography as near as possible, *eg.* Cubrilovic, but omitting diacritical marks. My excuses for that omission, which will doubtless offend purists, are the poor one that this is common practice, but also that these marks are not easily to be reproduced in a standard Western typeface, nor without the risk of error on the part of the non-initiate, nor indeed at all in HTML, for Internet publication.

Difficulties of this nature are nothing new. The reinvasion of Serbia in October 1915 was of course prominently reported and discussed in the British press. On 10<sup>th</sup> November 1915 *Punch* twitted the *Manchester Evening News* for spelling the name of 'a certain Serbian town' 7 different ways 'and all in one edition too: Kraguyevatz, Kraguyvatz, Kraguievatz, Kragievatz, Kraguyevac, Kragujevac, Krabujevacs'. Yet other spellings will be found below.

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THEOBALD RICHARD FITZWALTER BUTLER [24/05/1894 - 09/03/1976] was the only son of Mr. Theobald Butler of the Indian Woods and Forests Service and of Charlotte Elizabeth, daughter of Richard Bayly of Green Park, Co. Limerick. He entered Charterhouse in the summer term 1907 and was awarded a Senior Foundation Scholarship in 1908. He won prizes in Classics and Divinity; his near-monopoly of some of the prize lists over his later school years is impressive, and exceptional. He left at the end of the summer term 1913 with an Exhibition in Classics.

He is said by an obituarist to have been Head of School. That is incorrect, albeit not heinously so. He was made a school monitor in the autumn term 1910 and was then second in seniority from the autumn term 1911 until he left<sup>1</sup>. He was head of his own school house, Verites, from the autumn term 1912.

He went up to University College Oxford in the Michaelmas Term that year to read Classical Mods. [Classical Honour Moderations: the study of Greek and Latin classical writers] the first part of the Oxford Classics course. Then as now the entire Classics degree course lasted 4 years, of which Mods. comprised the first two. Through and through classicists went on to read 'Greats' [*Literae Humaniores*: philosophy and ancient history] but it was, and still is, possible to change track and to take a different subject to degree level for the final two years. Butler took a first in his Mods. examinations in the Trinity Term 1915, then went on to read Jurisprudence in which he also took a first, in the Trinity Term 1917. He graduated M.A. He was one of only a handful of men to take a degree during the War years.

He saw no military service. In his obituary in the 1976 edition of the University College Record a friend writes that when the Great War came he was 'unwilling to join the Army as he feared that he might be sent to fight his own [Irish] countrymen'. The obituary confirms that for a few months during the War he served as a civilian orderly at a Red Cross Hospital in Belgrade.

He probably went out to Serbia during the Long Vacation 1915, but certainly not earlier than the end of the preceding Trinity Term, when he sat his final examinations in Mods. The College room list shows him in residence up to and including that term, absent during the Michaelmas term 1915, then in residence again from the Hilary Term 1916 until he sat his finals. As his letter suggests, he eventually returned home in the late autumn of 1915, narrowly escaping before Serbia was entirely overrun.

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<sup>1</sup> Head of School from the autumn term 1912 until he too left in the summer of 1913 was Butler's exact contemporary at Charterhouse, Eric Archibald McNair [1894 - 1918]. He went on to join the Royal Sussex Regiment and in February 1916 he was awarded the Victoria Cross: the only Charterhouse V.C. That August he was severely wounded, and although he later returned to active service on a Staff appointment he eventually died in hospital, seemingly from late complications of his wound.

There is a particular but by no means unique irony in this close schooldays association of two young men whose wartime experiences turned out so completely opposite.

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He was accompanied on his Serbian adventure by his friend, fellow-classicist at University College and fellow-Irishman Eric Dodds<sup>2</sup> who gives a parallel account of their experiences in his 1977 autobiography *Missing Persons*, albeit based on 60 year old memories and fragmentary diaries. [See below: 'Two Irishmen Abroad', p 22.] Dodds went up to Oxford a year earlier, in 1912. Following his own Mods. examinations in the summer of 1914 he and another friend went on holiday to Germany, whence they fled over the Dutch border as War loomed, narrowly escaping 4 years' internment. These were interesting times, even for neutrals and non-combatants.

### An Irish Dilemma & its Solution

Butler's fear that if he joined the Army he might find himself fighting his own countrymen was well justified given the state of affairs in Ireland at the time. During the spring and summer of 1914, even up until the eve of War, the threat of serious civil unrest across the Irish Sea was a far more immediate preoccupation for the British Government than the European situation.

Ireland then was as much a part of the United Kingdom as England, Scotland or Wales; Irish constituencies sent MPs to Westminster like all the rest. Within itself too it was an administrative whole, there was no division between what we now regard as the North and the South. Nonetheless it remained perceptibly a land apart, with an identity of its own. From a tangle of historical and political grievances, some well-justified, and of cultural and religious differences, there existed too in many quarters a deep-rooted antipathy towards the British state, strongly felt and sometimes strongly expressed.

For generations the dearest ambition of many Irishmen had been Home Rule: an Irish parliament under the British Crown, sitting in Dublin; along similar constitutional lines to Canada perhaps. Some wanted more: complete independence, an Irish Republic. As frustration mounted over the years the independence movement gathered strength. A few of its more extreme elements were prepared to commit acts of violence to make their point and there were periodic outrages. The Fenian with his bomb was a recurrent figure of fear in Britain from the 1860's onwards.

As a further reflection and complication of Ireland's tangled past there were also deep internal antipathies; there was in fact not one uniting Irish identity but an untidy cluster, variously at odds with each other, and with individuals often caught painfully across the

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<sup>2</sup> Eric Robertson Dodds [1893 - 1979] After leaving Oxford in 1917 with a First Class degree in Classics he pursued a teaching and academic career. In 1924 he became a professor of Greek in the University of Birmingham. Whilst there he appointed to a lectureship the poet Louis MacNeice; they went on to become close friends, and he later acted as MacNeice's literary executor. Another friend was W.H. Auden. In 1936 he went to Oxford as Regius Professor of Greek.

Following World War II he assisted in rebuilding the German educational system. He wrote extensively, including some poetry of his own. He had a longstanding, but sceptical, interest in the supernatural and the occult; from 1927 he served on the council of the Society for Psychical Research, and as its president 1961 - 1963.

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divides. Particularly in Ulster<sup>3</sup> to the north, but not only there, many remained loyal to the Union, fiercely resistant to any suggestion Home Rule, still less of Independence, and if separation there must be the Ulstermen wanted none of it: there must then be Partition, with the North maintaining its *status quo* and the South going its own way. But Partition the South would not accept.

The impossibility of finding a solution entirely satisfactory to all sides, or even a tolerant compromise, confounded men of goodwill, promoting popular tribalism and threatening a breakdown in ordinary, peaceable politics. The picture was further coloured and passions further inflamed by an upsurge of regressive romanticism, harking back to the Ireland of myth and legend, much of this bogus or at best highly contrived. By 1914 moderation was wearing thin and there was an air of crisis. As Yeats<sup>4</sup> was to write a few years later: 'The best lack all convictions, while the worst are full of passionate intensity. Surely some revelation is at hand'.

The Home Rulers found natural allies in the British Liberal Party, the Unionists in the Conservative Party. A generation earlier during his brief third administration in 1886, Gladstone<sup>5</sup>, allying himself with the Irish Nationalist MPs at Westminster, had brought forward a Home Rule Bill, which was greeted by rioting in Ulster. It was at this juncture that Lord Randolph Churchill<sup>6</sup> coined his notorious slogan: 'Ulster will fight and Ulster will be right!'. Gladstone's own party split on the issue, the bill was defeated and his government fell. In 1893 during his fourth and final administration he tried again, and again Ulster rose in riot; the new bill was passed in the House of Commons but rejected by the Lords. The missed opportunity was to cast a long shadow, but there matters rested for the time being.

In 1912 another Liberal prime minister Herbert Asquith<sup>7</sup> made a fresh attempt. That summer his government pushed its own Home Rule Bill through the Commons. The odds on eventual success were now far shorter; by the Parliament Act 1911 the Lords could block the bill only twice, if it was passed by 3 successive sessions of the Commons within 2 years,

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<sup>3</sup> Ulster is the northernmost of the 4 original provinces of Ireland, the other 3 being Leinster to the south-east, Munster to the south-west & Connacht to the west. Historically it comprised 9 counties, of which only 6 were eventually included in Northern Ireland, as defined by the Government of Ireland Act 1920: hence, common usage notwithstanding, today's Northern Ireland and historical Ulster are not synonymous.

<sup>4</sup> William Butler Yeats [1865 - 1939] Irish poet and dramatist, and himself an arch-romanticist. These lines from his poem *The Second Coming* are often taken to refer to Ireland and the Irish over the period leading up to 1920 when it was written, although the poem as a whole has a wider focus.

<sup>5</sup> William Ewart Gladstone [1809 - 1898] British Liberal Party statesman and prime minister, 1868 - 1874, 1880 - 1885, 1886 & 1892 - 1894.

<sup>6</sup> Lord Randolph Henry Spencer Churchill [1849 - 1895] British Conservative Party statesman and father of Winston Spencer Churchill. [See footnote 33, p.14.]

<sup>7</sup> Herbert Henry Asquith [1852 - 1928] British Liberal Prime Minister April 1908 - December 1916, when he was succeeded by David Lloyd-George. [See footnote 15, p.9.] His own son Raymond Asquith [1878 - 1916] was killed on the Somme in September 1916: a handsome, outstandingly talented man who seemed to many to epitomise the lost wartime generation.

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it must become law. It was indeed blocked on that first occasion, then again in 1913. On 25<sup>th</sup> May 1914 it was passed by the Commons for a third time and sent for Royal Assent<sup>8</sup>.

The crucial difficulty was that the bill as it stood made no special provision for Ulster, which was to become part of Home Rule Ireland willy-nilly; any such provision, effectively implying Partition between North and South, remained anathema to the Nationalists. But the Ulstermen were not to be coerced and in 1911, recognising the direction of events, they set about raising a volunteer militia against that risk. This flourished, and in January 1913 it named itself the Ulster Volunteer Force.

By the spring of 1914 the U.V.F. numbered 100,000, it had a strong officer corps including many ex-British Army regulars, it was training enthusiastically, and it was well-armed with illegally imported German rifles. It also had the support, both overt and covert, of key figures in the Conservative Party, in the Army, including the War Office, and in wider society. The Nationalists similarly raised an armed volunteer force, the Irish Volunteers, and they too had their influential sympathisers. Both sides equally saw themselves as victims, or potential victims. Neither doubted the perfidy of its opponents, nor the justice of its own cause. Neither trusted the British government. Unless some understanding could be reached at the brink, which was now hard to envisage, the scene seemed set for rebellion, even for civil war, with the Army caught in the middle and its loyalties dangerously divided.

In March 1914, amid a succession of misunderstandings, 57 British Army officers based at the Curragh camp in County Kildare tendered their resignations rather than accept potential involvement in military action against Ulster: the so-called Curragh Incident, sometimes described as a 'mutiny'. Although it fell short of that it came uncomfortably close. The Incident eventually muddled its way to a conclusion, at the cost of three high-level resignations: of the Secretary of State for War, John Seely<sup>9</sup>, the Adjutant-General, Sir John Ewart<sup>10</sup> and the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Sir John French<sup>11</sup>. The Curragh officers were persuaded to withdraw their resignations and kept their posts.

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<sup>8</sup> The Home Rule Act 1914 finally received Assent on 18<sup>th</sup> September that year. By common consent its implementation was suspended for a year, or for the duration of the War. Meanwhile by a late amendment Ulster had been excluded from its provisions, temporarily and subject to further negotiations: a scheme accepted by the Unionists *faute de mieux* but which satisfied no-one.

<sup>9</sup> John Edward Bernard Seely [1868 - 1947] He became Secretary of State at the War Office in 1912, where he worked closely with Sir John French.

<sup>10</sup> Sir John Spencer Ewart [1861 - 1930] He was appointed Adjutant-General to the forces and second military member of the Army Council in 1910.

<sup>11</sup> Sir John Denton Pinkstone French [1852 - 1925] He was appointed C.I.G.S. in March 1912, and was promoted Field Marshal in June 1913. Following on from his resignation, to Winston Churchill he appeared 'a broken man'. He was nonetheless appointed Commander of the British Expeditionary Force in France and Flanders on the outbreak of war the following month; he continued as such until his replacement by Sir Douglas Haig in December 1915.



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Along the way a formal undertaking was made, then hastily disowned, that the army would not be used to suppress opposition to the Home Rule Bill<sup>12</sup>. The implication persisted however that any attempt to force Home Rule on Ulster through military action could now be discounted. The risk of major bloodshed might have been reduced, or it might not, but in any event this left little likelihood that Irish unity could be preserved; if Ulster stood firm, Home Rule for the South must entail Partition for the North. That this remained unstated was doubtless a matter of calculated policy but it seems unlikely that either side, Unionist in grim satisfaction or Nationalist in rebellious fury, failed to recognise the realities.

The Great War persuaded many Irishmen North and South to make common cause for the time being in face of the greater danger but Home Rule was to be held in abeyance, not abandoned<sup>13</sup>, there had been no final resolution of the Ulster issue, and more radical elements were yet further convinced that the future now lay not in Home Rule but in complete independence. Passions continued to smoulder. There were occasional flare-ups even during the War years: notably the abortive Easter Rising of April 1916, aimed at creating an independent Irish Republic. The Rising lasted just 7 days and was largely confined to Dublin but it was fierce enough while it lasted, with total casualties of over 1,200 on all sides, including civilians caught in the cross-fire, and about 450 deaths, including 140 British troops and 17 Irish police<sup>14</sup>.

From early 1918 onwards there was a sharp downturn in relationships between Great Britain and the South, triggered by Lloyd George's<sup>15</sup> clumsy attempt finally to introduce

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As Viscount French of Ypres he then served as C.-in-C. Home Forces until May 1918, when he was appointed Lord Lieutenant of Ireland. His period of office, until May 1921, covered the greater part of the 3 turbulent post-War years during which the Southern Irish finally prised themselves loose from the United Kingdom. The Anglo-Irish Treaty formalising the separation of the 26 southern counties as an independent state was signed in December 1921. He contributed to the conscription crisis in 1918 by arresting 73 Sinn Féin leaders on suspicion of conspiracy with the Germans, for which there was no convincing evidence whatsoever.

<sup>12</sup> No such undertaking was given as to action any against the Nationalists.

<sup>13</sup> On the declaration of war, John Redmond [1856 - 1918] leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party, a moderate and committed to a constitutional settlement, pledged his Party, and by extension that section of Irish opinion which it aspired to represent, to support the Allied war effort. Edward Carson for the Unionists [See footnote 70, p.33.] did likewise, but from a Party of ultra-loyalists that was only to be expected. In the shorter term Redmond's gesture, generous against the background of recent events, undoubtedly strengthened his political hand, but it was at odds with the spirit of the times, particularly in provincial Ireland. Its longer term effect was fundamentally to weaken the IPP's influence, even before the 1916 Easter Rising and the 1918 conscription crisis.

<sup>14</sup> The Rising had only limited public support in Ireland at the time, not least because the rebels openly declared their allegiance to the Central Powers, which went far beyond general acceptance, but the subsequent execution of 16 of its leaders and internment of 1,480 other participants or alleged participants excited more sympathy. It nonetheless triggered attempts to bring the Home Rule Act into effect forthwith, to forestall further unrest, but these ran into the sand as agreement still could not be reached on key points.

<sup>15</sup> David Lloyd George [1863 - 1945] He was Chancellor of the Exchequer under Asquith from 1908. In early 1915 he joined Churchill as one of the so-called 'Easterners', calling for assaults in the Balkans and the eastern Mediterranean so as to break the deadlock on the Western Front. In May that year he became Minister of Munitions and subsequently took credit for overcoming the serious shell shortage which was bedeviling the British war effort.

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conscription<sup>16</sup> to Ireland in response to the growing manpower shortage on the Western Front: a move opposed by Irish politicians from all sides and which led to widespread popular protest<sup>17</sup>.

With its electoral base terminally disaffected by the pent-up frustrations of the War years, the old Irish Parliamentary Party collapsed at the post-War general election in December 1918. It lost most of its seats to the more radical Sinn Féin which was determined to force the independence issue and whose MPs accordingly refused to take their seats at Westminster; mere Home Rule was no longer enough. Independence for the South eventually followed 3 years later, but amidst continuing internecine differences which shortly led on to civil war in Southern Ireland 1922 - 1923; and with the 6 northern counties firmly partitioned off, to become a focus of further unrest down the years.

Like Butler, Dodds was a protestant but also a convinced Irish Nationalist; he later remarked that he had the wrong religion for one half of Ireland and the wrong politics for the other half, and from 1919 onwards he lived the rest of his life in England. He was eventually rusticated from University College, having too openly expressed his support for the Easter Rising; it cannot have helped his case that the then Master, Reginald Macan<sup>18</sup>, a Dubliner, was a passionate Unionist. He was permitted to return to sit his finals in 1917, when he took a first in Greats. He later had a distinguished academic career, becoming Regius Professor of Greek at Oxford in 1936.

The Irish, North and South, were well represented in the British regular army and during the War over 300,000 more volunteered but Dodds felt no immediate obligation to involve himself. If, as they purported, the British were fighting for democracy and the rights of small nations such as Belgium and Serbia, why had they allied themselves with autocratic Russia and what of their own record in Ireland? In his address to the Commons on 4<sup>th</sup> August 1914 on the declaration of war Asquith declared: 'We are fighting to vindicate the principle that small nationalities are not to be crushed in defiance of international good faith at the arbitrary will of a strong, overmastering power'. He was referring to the German violation of Belgian neutrality<sup>19</sup>; dependent on point of view that was either the principal *casus belli* or at least the crucial deciding factor after their invasion of France.

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In July 1916 following Lord Kitchener's death at sea, Lloyd George was appointed his successor as Secretary of State for War. In December 1916 he replaced Asquith as Prime Minister. He continued as such through the Victory of 1918, the Armistice and the Versailles Peace Conference, and into the early post-war years. In 1921 - 22 he oversaw the eventual partitioning of Ireland. He fell from office in October 1922.

<sup>16</sup> See also p. 45.

<sup>17</sup> See also footnote 11, p.8.

<sup>18</sup> Reginald Walter Macan [1848 - 1941] Master of University College 1906 - 1923. He was himself educated at Charterhouse [1864 - 1867] and later became a member of the School's Governing Body [1896 - 1928, *ie.* until the age of 80]. His cousin Francis William Macan [1851 - 1916] was another Carthusian; who also ended his days at the London Charterhouse, as a beneficiary of the School's twin foundation for the care of elderly gentlemen. An older brother Arthur Vernon Macan [1843 - 1908] educated in Dublin earned distinction and eventually a knighthood as an obstetrician and gynaecologist. Earlier in his career he had served as a medical volunteer with the Prussian army during the Franco-Prussian War.

R.W. Macan's son Robert Basil Macan [1882 - 1915] was at Charterhouse too, 1896 - 1899. He went on to join the Indian Army. He was killed in action in Flanders.

<sup>19</sup> Luxembourg too had been overrun.

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But to many Irishmen Ireland was just such a small nationality and Great Britain just such an overmastering power.

Over the following months as the War tightened its grip and the casualty lists lengthened, Dodds became increasingly uneasy. He began to fear lest he was merely rationalising cowardice, and that in any event he was missing out on something important; that warfare, however repulsive, was in some mysterious way a valuable part of human experience. As he tells us, Butler found himself in much the same quandary.

They were clearly cut from similar cloth, although Dodds appears to have been more a man of action, and more impulsive, Butler no less passionate but usually better controlled, more philosophical. The author C.S. Lewis<sup>20</sup>, an Ulsterman, coincided with Butler at University College in his own first term, the Trinity Term 1917, which was Butler's last. He describes Butler variously and a little inconsistently, in letters written at the time, as a 'Nationalist', 'a violent Home Ruler' and a 'poetical and sentimental complete separationist'. He confirms that: 'Butler, the Home Ruler, is not serving [in the armed forces] for political reasons'. He also remarks: 'I like Butler exceedingly'.

Sometime in the early months of 1915 an honourable compromise presented itself. 'There had been a serious outbreak of typhus in Serbia and medical teams were being hastily organised to bring help to our distressed ally. The British Eastern Auxiliary Hospital in Belgrade was advertising for orderlies. Here was an opportunity to see at close quarters what War was really like. ... It promised the necessary spice of danger, yet without the commitment to kill and indeed without long-term commitment of any sort.' Dodds talked matters over with Butler, they applied, were interviewed in London by Lady Troubridge the patroness of the enterprise, and accepted.

### Serbia in Crisis 1914 - 1915

The epidemics which sprang up in Serbia following the earlier, failed Austrian invasion in the autumn of 1914 were indeed serious. From January through March 1915 there were probably 500,000 cases of typhus<sup>21</sup> and relapsing fever<sup>22</sup>, both louse-borne diseases, out of

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<sup>20</sup> Clive Staples Lewis [1898 - 1963] Later a distinguished academic, author and Christian thinker. Insofar as it reflects on the theme of this paper his early career is described in the main text. See p.45 et seq. for an outline of his war service, also footnote 96, p.46.

<sup>21</sup> Epidemic typhus is caused by infection with the bacterium *Rickettsia prowazekii*, which is transmitted not directly person to person but *via* the body louse acting as a carrier or 'vector', so that epidemics can occur only in populations amongst whom louse infestation is widespread. According to one contemporary account: 'Doctors who have recently returned from Serbia report dark-brown patches, as big as half-crowns, on the skins of wounded natives, which on touching begin to move - a clotted scab of lice!' There is no animal reservoir, or rather the reservoir is man himself.

The crucial rôle of the louse was established by Howard Taylor Ricketts of the University of Chicago in 1910; Ricketts himself caught typhus as a result of his studies and died that same year. The genus of bacteria to which typhus belongs is named in his honour.

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a total population of 3 million, with at least 120,000 deaths. Of 450 doctors in the whole country before the War at least half themselves took sick and over 100 died. When Dr. William Hunter<sup>23</sup>, senior physician to the London Fever Hospital, arrived in Serbia at the head of an official British Government medical mission on 4<sup>th</sup> March 1915 he found ‘a raging pestilence, uncontrolled; ... conditions in hospitals indescribably bad; ... *urgent, urgent* need [The italics are Hunter’s own.] for beds and blankets, bed linen, shirts and clothes for ... patients’.

Thanks to the Serbs’ own energetic recruiting, fundraising and propagandising, spearheaded by Madame Mabel Grouitch<sup>24</sup>, the American wife of Dr. Slavko Grouitch<sup>25</sup> a senior Serb diplomat, it had become the done thing to support ‘gallant little Serbia’; the more so because for the time being Serbia was the only member of the Alliance against the Central Powers<sup>26</sup> which had enjoyed any signal military success. Hunter’s reports gave

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Historically typhus has been common, with frequent outbreaks in confined populations, hence some of its old names: ship fever, hospital fever, jail fever. Larger epidemics have often followed wars or natural disasters, with the risks of transmission compounded by population movements, close living and uncleanness, and normal resilience reduced by privation, wounds and other disease. Epidemic typhus compounded the effects of the Irish Potato Famine in the 1840’s. It was a major ‘natural’ cause of death in the German concentration camps during the Second World War; amongst its victims was Anne Frank, in Bergen-Belsen.

Symptoms include severe headache and muscular pains, a high fever, chills, cough, a typical rash beginning after 5 days and delirium. Untreated, the mortality rate typically runs around 10% - 40% but may exceed 50% amongst patients who are otherwise vulnerable. Survivors recover after about 2 weeks. Until the antibiotic era there was no treatment beyond good nursing care, when available, but meticulous delousing could effectively protect individuals from infection and check epidemics. This was the key to Richard Hunter’s success in Serbia in 1915 [See below, footnote 23.] which provided powerful confirmation of Ricketts’ work. An effective vaccine was first developed in 1930.

Doctors and nurses treating typhus patients are themselves notoriously vulnerable to cross-infection, as the mortality rate amongst the Serb doctors demonstrates.

Through the later 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries the incidence of typhus in Europe steadily fell, alongside general improvements in health and hygiene. In Ireland in the 10 years 1871 - 1880 there were 7,495 reported typhus deaths, in the 3 years 1909 - 1911 just 143. The upsurge in Serbia and elsewhere during the War ran sharply counter to the former peacetime trend.

<sup>22</sup> Relapsing fever is caused by infection with the spirochaete bacterium *Borrelia recurrentis*. Its mode of transmission, *via* the body louse, the risk factors for epidemic disease, its general symptoms and its mortality rate, its treatment and control measures are all similar to those for typhus.

<sup>23</sup> Dr. William Hunter [1861 - 1937] He studied medicine in Edinburgh. From 1895 he was affiliated to Charing Cross Hospital and to the London Fever Hospital. During his service in Serbia he developed a simple, effective and eventually widely-used delousing device which became known as the Serbian Barrel. This was an old oil-drum or suchlike with the bottom knocked out and replaced by wire mesh, in which infested clothes were steamed over boiling water for 45 minutes, killing both lice and eggs.

<sup>24</sup> Mme. Mabel Grouitch née Mabel Dunlop, an American citizen. She was clearly committed, energetic and persuasive; she and her husband [See below, footnote 25] made a formidable but popular team. She commenced her fundraising efforts within weeks of the outbreak of war. She was influential in the establishment of the British based Serbian Relief Fund under the Patronage of Queen Mary, one of whose first hospital units, Lady Paget’s, left for Serbia as early as 29<sup>th</sup> October 1914. [See footnotes 52, p.29 & 79, p.37.]

<sup>25</sup> Dr. Slavko Grouitch, a Serb. He was a career diplomat who originally met his wife in 1901 while he was Secretary to the Serbian legation in Athens and she was studying archæology there. Between the Wars he served long-term as Yugoslav Minister to Washington then for a period in the 1930s as Yugoslav Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary in London. He was created an honorary British knight for diplomatic services.

<sup>26</sup> See footnote 37, p.16.

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further encouragement. It was conveniently forgotten that following on the Serb-inspired assassinations of Archduke Franz Ferdinand<sup>27</sup> of Austro-Hungary and his consort the Duchess of Hohenberg<sup>28</sup> at Sarajevo on 28<sup>th</sup> June 1914<sup>29</sup>, and before the resultant outbreak of war 6 weeks later, Great Britain had shared with virtually the whole of Europe the view expressed by Herbert Asquith to his Archbishop of Canterbury, Randall Davidson<sup>30</sup> on 31<sup>st</sup> July 1914: that the Serbs deserved ‘a thorough thrashing’<sup>31</sup>. Even his sympathetic biographer, a fellow-clergyman, does not record that the Archbishop demurred.

Several voluntary hospital units were got up in Great Britain and sent out under the auspices of the Red Cross, with some from America also, and from Russia. Nominally at least, the British Eastern Hospital was one such, although as Dodds tells us later its credentials were perhaps open to doubt. Madame Grouitch herself founded and for a time worked at the American Hospital in Belgrade whence Dr. Ryan had the British Eastern’s patients removed on the evening of 8<sup>th</sup> October 1915. Inevitably quite a number of the foreign volunteers themselves caught typhus and some died. There was also the risk of becoming caught up in further fighting. A commitment to this work was no small matter<sup>32</sup>.

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<sup>27</sup> Archduke Franz Ferdinand [1863 - 1914] Heir Apparent to the Austrian throne. He was cousin to the original Heir Apparent, Crown Prince Rudolf, the son of the Habsburg Emperor Franz Joseph and Empress Elisabeth of Austria, who died without issue at the royal hunting lodge in Mayerling on 30<sup>th</sup> January 1889, in a probable suicide pact with his mistress the Baroness Mary Vetsera.

<sup>28</sup> Duchess of Hohenberg [1868 - 1914] She was born Countess Sophie Chotek. In her own right she ranked only as minor nobility; nonetheless as the Archduke fell in love with her and entirely contrary to protocol he insisted on marrying her. Pope Leo XIII, Tsar Nicholas II of Russia, and the German Emperor Wilhelm II all made representations to Emperor Franz Joseph on his behalf. Eventually it was agreed that the couple should contract a morganatic marriage; hence their children were barred from succession, nor was Sophie permitted to share her husband’s rank, title, or precedence.

<sup>29</sup> It was on 28<sup>th</sup> June, St. Vitus’ day, 1389 that the Serbs were defeated by the Ottoman Turks at the Battle of Kosovo, following which Serbia remained a Turkish vassal state for many centuries; but as proud legend had it, that very day a surviving Serb found his way into the Ottoman camp and assassinated the Sultan, Murad, in his hour of victory. The Archduke and his advisors would have done well to heed the anniversary. Bosnia and Herzegovina were former Turkish provinces which had been placed under the protection of the Austro-Hungarian Empire by the Treaty of Berlin in 1878. Both included in their populations large minorities of Serbs who had counted on eventual complete independence, or incorporation into a Greater Serbia, as a step towards an eventual pan-Slav state: a move however which would have been hotly contested by the other ethnic groupings. Instead they had been formally annexed by Austro-Hungary in 1908, and Serb sensibilities were still raw. [See also footnote 91, p.44.]

<sup>30</sup> Randall Davidson [1848 - 1930] Archbishop of Canterbury 1903 - 1928; on his retirement he had been the longest-serving Archbishop of Canterbury since the Reformation.

<sup>31</sup> In a speech reported in *The Times* on 1<sup>st</sup> July 1914 Asquith declared: ‘We are once more confronted with one of those incredible crimes which almost make us despair of the progress of mankind.’

As recorded in the Archbishop’s diary, on 31<sup>st</sup> July 1914 they discussed the current crisis at some length; he opined: ‘The position, were it not so tragic, is almost ludicrous.’ Asquith described Serbia as: ‘a wild little state ... for which nobody has a good word, so badly has it behaved’ and expressed the view that ‘France and Russia, and still more Germany, are averse to going to War - and Germany is actively eager to the contrary’: a fine piece of wishful thinking and in complete misapprehension of German intentions, long formulated, as events were shortly to demonstrate.

<sup>32</sup> There were many casualties amongst medical volunteers in the Balkans before the War’s end. They included Catherine Harley, sister of Sir John French [See footnote 11, p.8] who was killed by shellfire commanding a column of motor ambulances in Macedonia in 1917.

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### The Troubridges & the Danube Naval Mission

Una Lady Troubridge [1887 - 1963] who recruited Dodds and Butler was the second wife of Rear Admiral Sir Ernest Troubridge [1862 - 1926] whose first wife died young, and 25 years his junior. Troubridge was the scion of a distinguished family. His great-grandfather Sir Thomas Troubridge, was one of Nelson's 'band of brothers' and reputed as one of the most talented naval captains of his time. His grandfather was also a notable seaman and later a Lord of the Admiralty. His father joined the army and was severely wounded in the Crimean War. His own son also became an admiral.

Missing his own best chance of glory, Sir Ernest won enduring obloquy instead, or at least blighted his own career and excited enduring controversy, when as Commander of the Mediterranean Cruiser Squadron, on 7<sup>th</sup> August 1914 3 days after the British declaration of war on Germany, he let the German battle cruiser *Goeben* and the light cruiser *Breslau* escape from the Adriatic; they then made their way to Turkey. The Kaiser's subsequent gift of those two ships to the Turks was credited by some at the time with bringing Turkey into the War on 29<sup>th</sup> October that year, alongside the Central Powers. In the light of what followed, both during and after the Great War, one modern author even goes so far as to describe the *Goeben* as 'the ship that changed the world'.

That may be to overvalue the episode. The 'Young Turks' in the Turkish government, the new men, Germanophile and ambitious, were urgently seeking an opportunity to enter the War alongside the Central Powers, which they would surely have found, or created, soon enough in any event. Certainly though, the possession of two powerful ships gave them a means which they had formerly lacked, easily and advantageously to provoke hostilities with Russia. Certainly too the German rear admiral Wilhelm Souchon [1864 - 1946] in command of those ships was equally eager to do so, enthusiastically backed by the German government, even if necessary to force the Turks' hands through unordered aggressive action.

Troubridge cited Admiralty standing orders as reason for breaking off his initial pursuit; whatever his other qualities, any sense of the Nelsonian blind eye which may have rubbed off on his great-grandfather clearly had not survived the generations. At the same time his caution was certainly defensible and possibly wise, and the responsibility was not his alone. There can be little doubt that, like Admiral Byng two centuries earlier, he was subsequently offered up for sacrifice to cover embarrassment at higher levels. At his court-martial later that year for failure to engage the enemy he was 'fully and honourably acquitted', but he was never again given a sea command.

Early in 1915 after a period on the beach he was interviewed by Winston Churchill<sup>33</sup>, then first Lord of the Admiralty, and appointed head of the British Naval Mission to Serbia. He

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<sup>33</sup> Winston Spencer Churchill [1874 - 1965] Later and famously British Prime Minister 1940 - 1945 during the Second World War in succession to Neville Chamberlain, but at the time in question First Lord of the Admiralty [1911 - 1915]. When Asquith formed his all-party coalition government in May 1915, the Conservatives demanded Churchill's removal as part of their price for co-operation. Later that year he rejoined the army on the Western Front as Battalion Commander of the 6<sup>th</sup> Royal Scots Fusiliers.

He remained *persona non grata* for the time being through his shared responsibility in the Gallipoli *débâcle*. [See below, p. 16.] until in July 1917 Lloyd George brought him back into the government as Minister of Munitions. Post-war in January 1919 he became Secretary of State for War and Secretary of State for Air, then in

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arrived in Belgrade on 22<sup>nd</sup> February that year to liaise with the small French and Russian missions already there and generally to take stock of the situation. The French voluntarily put themselves under his command, the Russians remained independent, but they were soon all on good terms together. He was also given a contingent of Serb troops to pad out his own small force. It was scarcely an Admiral's command. According to Lieut. E. Hilton Young<sup>34</sup> who joined the Mission in September 1915 it then comprised, at full strength, just 'some 40 seaman-gunners, seamen-torpedo-men, armourers, shipwrights and so on and some 30 marines. The parts of flag-lieutenant and first executive officer were doubled by Lieutenant-Commander Kerr, R.N., D.S.O.'. There were also two Marine officers: Major Elliot, R.M.A. and Lieutenant Bullock, R.M.[temp.].

The other part of Troubridge's rôle as it developed was to act as liaison officer with the Serbs, which he did with some success, although it is clear from his despatches and from a journal<sup>35</sup> he kept that he formed no very high opinion of them. Along with the British military *attaché* Colonel Philips, an old Balkan hand, in private conversation he was sometimes openly contemptuous, but he was contemptuous too of most other foreign nations, save the Germans.

Then as now the Danube, 1,500 Metres wide at Belgrade just below its confluence with the River Sava, was a major route for trade and traffic of all descriptions through the heart of eastern Europe. With the Serbs still blocking the Balkan railway link to Constantinople, it was the only substantial secure route connecting Germany and Turkey. Together with the Sava it also marked Serbia's frontier with Austria; today's frontier lies further north.

During the War the writer John Buchan<sup>36</sup> was a Major in the British Intelligence Corps. Fictionally, but doubtless on sound information, in the second of his Richard Hannay novels, *Greenmantle*, he has Hannay describe 'endless strings of barges, loaded up [with munitions] at the big factories of Westphalia, moving through the canals from the Rhine or the Elbe to the Danube'. These were then towed downstream by river steamers, themselves of 1,000 tons or so, past Vienna, Budapest and Belgrade, and beyond, unloaded at the Bulgarian river port of Ruschuk, and their cargoes taken on by rail to the Black Sea at Varna. Through 1915, these were chiefly bound for the Turkish forces defending Gallipoli, but then and thereafter also for their compatriots fighting the British in Palestine and Mesopotamia. Germany was the Turks' main arsenal throughout. As Buchan also tells us, the barges did not return empty, they 'came back full of Turkish cotton and Bulgarian beef and Rumanian corn'. Turkey and its Balkan neighbours in turn were a major source of food and raw materials for the Central Powers.

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1921 Secretary of State for the Colonies. As such he was a signatory of the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921, which established the Irish Free State.

<sup>34</sup> Lieutenant Edward Hilton Young R.N.V.R. [1879 - 1960] See Booklist. [See also footnote 81, p.38.]

<sup>35</sup> See footnote 76, p.36.

<sup>36</sup> John Buchan [1875 - 1940] Author and publisher, wartime propagandist and intelligence chief. In 1935 he was created Baron Tweedsmuir and appointed Governor General of Canada.

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This exchange was essential so as to bypass the Allied<sup>37</sup> naval blockade. It was to that blockade, largely out of sight, as much as to the long, attritional slog on the Western Front, which then as now seemed to epitomise their war effort, that the Allies<sup>37</sup> owed their eventual victory in November 1918. By then the Germans were both militarily outmatched and starving.

Although the later large-scale commitment of land forces at Gallipoli was not yet anticipated when Troubridge received his command, it was already clear that any disruption of the Danube river traffic, but particularly of military supplies, would be invaluable. It would put further pressure on the Turks, alongside the British naval assault on the Dardanelles commencing on 19<sup>th</sup> February 1915, which was intended to open the straits and to knock Turkey out of the War. It would help to discourage the Bulgarians, as yet still neutral, from throwing in their lot with the Central Powers. It was even envisaged that with the Dardanelles open, Allied reinforcements might be brought through to Serbia up the Danube; and perhaps that a fresh front might then be opened against the Austrians.

All of this was part of the Eastern policy, vigorously promoted by Winston Churchill, Lloyd George and other leading British politicians, and supported too by many in the French government, intended to side-step the existing impasse on the Western Front<sup>38</sup> in France and Flanders by developing a grand outflanking movement in the eastern Mediterranean, and beyond. Ranged against them were the Westerners: most of their own senior generals

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<sup>37</sup> At the outset of the Great War the chief powers allied against Germany and Austro-Hungary, and from October 1914 Turkey, were Great Britain, with her overseas Dominions, France and Russia. In Britain at least, the enemy were commonly dubbed 'The Central Powers'; herself and those chief allies 'The *Entente* Powers', after the *Ententes* with France and Russia, informal diplomatic agreements short of full treaties, which together with the formal treaties guaranteeing Belgian neutrality brought her into the War.

These intimations of unforced goodwill drew a veil over the consideration that subsidiary to the Franco-Russian Alliance of 1892, France and Russia did indeed have a full and fierce military convention binding them, in very specific terms, to mutual military support in the event of war with any part of the existing Triple Alliance of Germany, Austro-Hungary or Italy; those terms were not made public until 1918.

Italy prudently withdrew from the Triple Alliance in August 1914, rather than join in the War, on the good grounds that this was a defensive treaty, whereas her co-signatories were on the offensive. Germany however, despite taking the leading rôle throughout, continued to consider herself part of an Alliance, variously numbered as the War progressed. [See footnote 75, p.35.]

Also veiled was the reality that the Franco-British *Entente* included military 'conversations', for long concealed even from the British cabinet and certainly from Parliament, which led on to a settled military [including naval] expectation of joint action in the event of war and, crucially, to prior plans and dispositions in expectation of such action. Any last-minute repudiation by either side would leave both parties in a worse case than if they had never worked together at all.

Of other European nations, Belgium, although largely overrun, was 'in' from the outset, with a small army fighting alongside the French and British on the Western Front; Italy declared war on Austria in May 1915; Germany declared war on Portugal in March 1916; the USA declared war on Germany in April 1917.

In the Balkans, Serbia was the flashpoint of the entire catastrophe. Montenegro too was 'in' from the outset, and alongside Serbia eventually fell to the Austrians in January 1916; Bulgaria declared war on Serbia in October 1915, Germany and Austro-Hungary on Romania in August 1916, Bulgaria on Romania in October 1916.

Elsewhere around the globe, Japan was a covertly significant player whose entry into the War in Britain's support in August 1914 had little direct influence in the European theatre but served Japan's expansionist aims in the Pacific and in mainland China, sowing the seeds of a later disaster.

<sup>38</sup> In Churchill's own words, to 'stop men chewing barbed wire in Flanders'.



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supported, in Britain, by the Northcliffe<sup>39</sup> press. The Easterners' strategic argument was persuasive, but entirely vitiated by tactical failures in the event. The Gallipoli campaign, typifying all later efforts also, was bravely fought, but inadequately supported and incompetently prosecuted at every level. Of itself it failed utterly, and worse, it absorbed manpower and material resources which might more profitably have been employed elsewhere. The later campaigns in Salonica and in Italy are open to similar charges<sup>40</sup>.

Today's developed consensus amongst popular historians that the Easterners were misguided in principle in diverting effort from the Western Front, militates against a proper understanding why and how the Allies' Eastern Mediterranean efforts developed as they did. The substantial failure of those efforts seems to make the historians' case. But had the Gallipoli campaign or an earlier, putative Balkan campaign succeeded, as well they might with sounder tactics and the luck of war a little different, doubtless it would now be the sloggers in France and Flanders who were blamed, for strategic timidity. Like one of J.R.R. Tolkien's palantíri, hindsight can provide a wonderfully clear view, but sometimes a wonderfully misleading perspective.

Through January and early February 1915, at the same time as the British were planning a purely naval operation to break through the Dardanelles, in concert with the French they were also actively considering a military expedition to the Balkans. The hope was to deter a fresh Austro-German attack on Serbia and to rally Greece, Romania and Bulgaria, all as yet still neutral, to the Allied cause. This was the more desirable as the Bulgarians, sworn enemies of the Serbs, already showed signs of swinging the other way.

For the time being, with the Dardanelles still sealed tight to Allied shipping and the Adriatic essentially an Austrian lake, the only practical route into landlocked Serbia lay *via* the Greek port of Salonica, at the head of the Aegean sea, where it would also be necessary to establish a base. That was by no means only a logistic issue. Active assistance, even mere acquiescence, in the transmission of military personnel and *materiel* to a belligerent would be a serious breach of neutrality. Concessions of this magnitude must draw Greece into the War, with all that might entail: harassment of her shipping by enemy submarines, even a Bulgarian invasion if Bulgaria did indeed declare for the Central Powers.

On 8<sup>th</sup> February 1915 it was agreed in outline that one British division, the 29<sup>th</sup>, and one French should be sent to Salonica. Within a week, the British and French envoys in Athens delivered a joint note to the Greek government, making the proposal, but despite his own keen sympathy towards the Allied cause the Greek prime minister Eleutherios Venizelos<sup>41</sup> declined to put his country at risk, and there the Balkan project died.

On a more discreet scale however the Greeks were readier to co-operate, or at least to turn a blind eye. Troubridge and his sailors and marines were spirited in, in civilian attire. Later they described to Fortier Jones, an American author serving as a volunteer orderly, how this was achieved. 'They left England on a battleship which took them to Malta. There

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<sup>39</sup> See footnote 62, p.32.

<sup>40</sup> The Palestine and Mesopotamia campaigns against the Turks fell into a different category, given the vital strategic importance of the Suez Canal, hence of Egypt, and of India.

<sup>41</sup> See footnote 65, p.32.

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they disembarked, and their uniforms were taken from them, but each was given a suit of citizen's clothes. They assured me that these were the worst clothes that anybody ever had to wear for the sake of his country. Rigged out in this ludicrous raiment - the Government had seen no necessity of taking their measures - they boarded a passenger boat and came to Salonica as "commercial travellers". They were allowed little time to ply their trade however, for a train was waiting to whisk them across the Serbian border, where they resumed their real character.'

In fact they did not immediately shed their disguise. Another witness, Dr. J. Johnston Abraham [1876 - 1963] a British surgeon working at a Red Cross hospital in Skopje, encountered them at the railway station there, in transit, one evening early in 1915, accompanied by their naval Captain. The whole party were still 'disguised absurdly in ready-made civilian clothes'. As 'commercial samples' they were carrying with them 32 tons of high explosives, labelled 'Paprika - Hot Stuff'.

By what *legerdemain* their eight 4.7 inch naval guns and ammunition, mines, torpedoes and torpedo launchers were passed through is not recorded. Doubtless these were discreetly crated but doubtless too bribes were exchanged to persuade the port authorities to look the other way. Austrian agents in Salonica are certainly said to have been counter-bribing in an attempt to ensure that consignments were delayed or 'lost'. When later the British attempted to ship in an entire steam torpedo boat, in sections, it was temporarily impounded, but eventually even this received clearance; the sections were then sent north by rail for assembly on the Belgrade waterfront. Additional boats followed later.

The Germans had a well-developed secret service network based in Athens, with agents passing themselves off as neutrals regularly travelling on the passenger vessels into Salonica reporting on incomers, and in the port itself<sup>42</sup>, so that they cannot have been blind to what was going on.

Besides Troubridge's 8 guns, the French had three, of 14cm calibre, and the Russians one, of 15cm, which was set up in the Kalimegdan Fortress above the waterfront. This was clearly 'the only gun of any size defending Belgrade ... manned by a party of Russian sailors' to which Butler refers, although he overstates its significance alongside the other Allied artillery, and in reality none of this was intended primarily for defence of the city, but for use against enemy shipping. The Russians originally had two guns, manufactured as long ago as 1867 and refurbished in 1894, but through an error in loading one was destroyed on its first firing.

Not all the mines were ordinary sea-mines, laid and left to await the incautious hull, some were observation mines, electrically fired under the control of a shore observer. If an enemy vessel steered its course within the mine's radius of effect it could be detonated, with resultant destruction; a friendly vessel could proceed with impunity.

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<sup>42</sup> In his diary entry for Tuesday 2<sup>nd</sup> November 1915 Lieutenant-Colonel Charles à Court Repington [1858 - 1925] military correspondent for *The Times*, quotes a report that: 'Kraguevatch, the Serbian arsenal has fallen and the enemy is now close on Nish. ... The German spies sit in rows on the quay a Salonika smoking large cigars, and note down every man, horse, gun and ton of stores landed.' He comments: 'This is a nice way to make war! ... There is going to be a nice mess here soon.'

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In the confined waters of the Danube and the Sava around Belgrade, contact mines used indiscriminately would have threatened friend and foe alike, and had they washed away there was also the risk of damage to neutral shipping downstream; an observation mine which broke free of its electric cable was automatically rendered harmless. At this stage in the War nothing could have been worse than to antagonise either of those two Balkan neutrals, but in hope future allies, with their mutual border along the lower Danube: Bulgaria to the south or Romania to the north.

Nonetheless, a weakness in the observation mine system was the vulnerability of the observer, who must have a close view over the river, and of the electrical connection. As eventually proved, both were at risk from enemy artillery fire, direct assault or other decisive means.

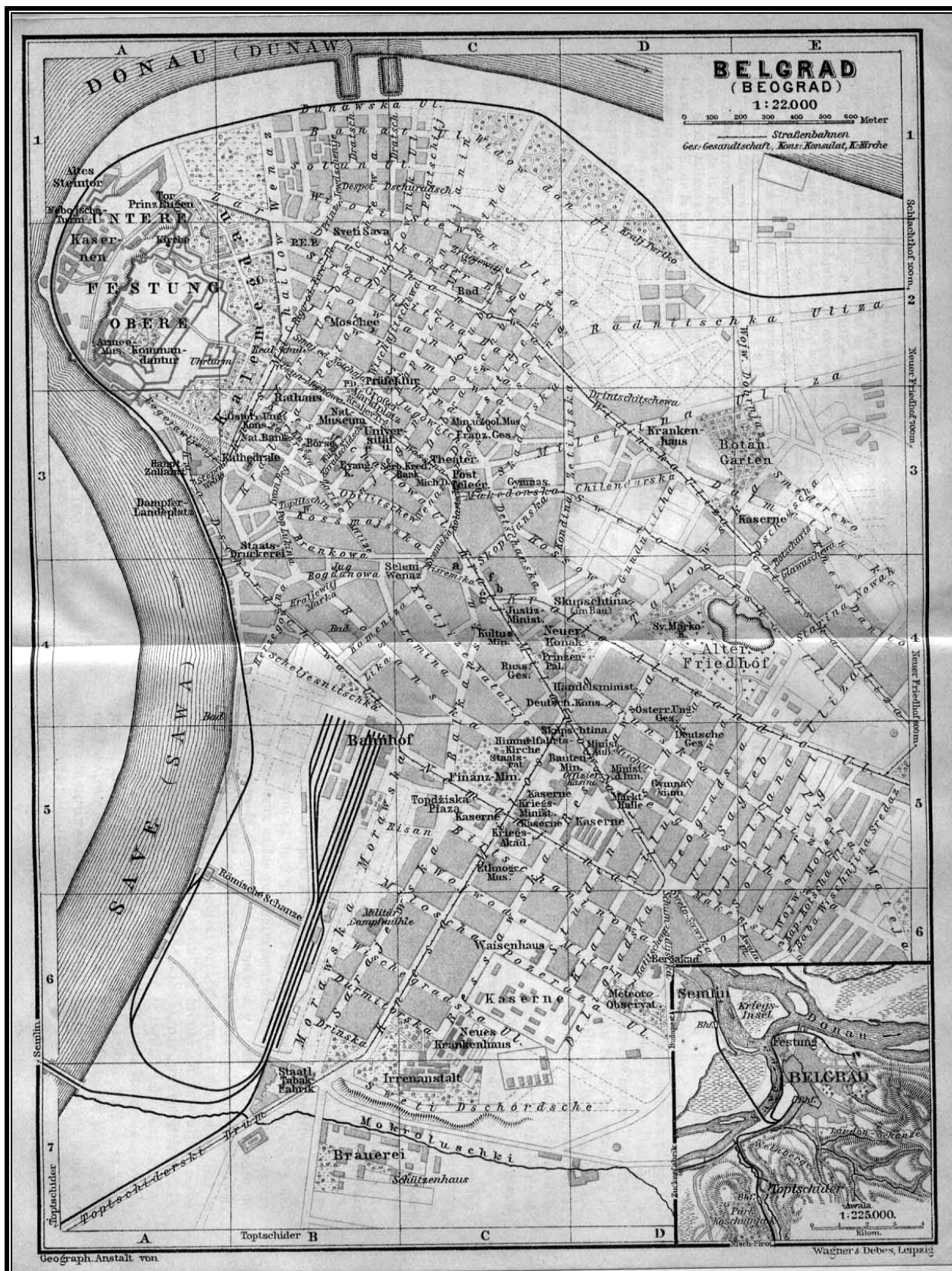
A large part of the Naval Mission's task was to counter the Austrian's Danube Flotilla: a formidable navy *en petit* comprising monitors, lighter patrol boats and support craft. All of the monitors, shallow draft mini-battleships with armoured hulls, carried at least one 12cm naval gun in a turret, most had two, some also carried a 12cm howitzer and all had mounted 7cm cannons, and machine guns.

At the outset of the War in 1914 there were 6 of these, one of which was sunk by a Russian mine in October 1914. 4 more were then built so that by the date of the assault on Belgrade in October 1915 there were 9. There were about as many patrol boats. The Flotilla's chief purposes were to combat enemy vessels and to play a field artillery rôle in supporting river crossings, or in land actions close by the river.

With the advent of the Naval Mission's heavy guns, which outranged those on the monitors, the Flotilla had to shift its anchorages up river. Thereafter, through the summer months of 1915 it gave little trouble on the Belgrade stretch. Occasionally a monitor came down on at night to reconnoitre, and might fire a few shells into the city, but the nights were short, and the city guns were supported by searchlights. Troubridge in turn sent his boats patrolling upstream to make mischief, also at night as daytime operations were altogether too hazardous.

In April his picket boat crew believed they had sunk one of the monitors at anchor, with sufficient circumstantial evidence in support that they were later able to claim prize money, but in fact it had merely shifted its moorings in response to the attack. Overall, throughout their whole period of operations, the boat patrols did little damage.

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It may be that guns, minefields and patrol boats combined effectively denied the river to the Danube Flotilla, but the impression gained is that whether through indolence or through strategy the Austrians perhaps chose to hold their fire for the time being, awaiting the autumn's decisive blow. If they had so chosen, their artillery opposite Belgrade could quickly have done more damage than all the monitors combined, and at no risk of heavy retaliation. This too held its fire.

### The Naval Hospital

A fortnight after his arrival Troubridge sent a despatch to London, requesting a variety of warlike stores but also a hospital unit to care for the men under his command: originally just 400, both British and Serb, although that number later increased. In view of the typhus epidemic then raging, some such provision was very desirable. He already had a naval surgeon who was deemed sufficient cover for his British contingent, there was no question of sending further naval personnel to provide for the Serbs. Accordingly his wife set about making arrangements through the Red Cross<sup>43</sup>.

Within weeks she had raised sufficient funds by voluntary subscription and assembled a team. As chief surgeon she recruited Sir Alexander Ogston [1844 - 1929] an eminent if elderly surgeon and bacteriologist, with one other surgeon, a physician, two administrators, a matron, 7 'nurses', of whom 3 were probably V.A.D.s<sup>44</sup> [Voluntary Aid Detachment, *ie.* nursing auxiliaries] and 3 male orderlies.

Ogston had a longstanding interest in military surgery; he was a one-time member of the pre-War committee set up to consider the future organisation of the Army Medical Corps. Despite his age, he remained professionally active during the Great War. He was first of all attached to the Southall Auxiliary Military Hospital, then 1916 - 1917 after his spell in Serbia to the first British ambulance unit in Italy, working with the Second Italian army.

Later in 1915, with her husband away at the wars, the second Lady Troubridge commenced a Sapphic relationship with the novelist Marguerite Radclyffe-Hall [1880 - 1943] famously the author of that 'Bible of Lesbianism', *The Well of Loneliness*; she later wrote Radclyffe-Hall's biography. She and Troubridge separated in 1919. He is said to have possessed a resilient sense of humour, which he needed; nothing so much takes the wind

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<sup>43</sup> Volunteer personnel serving in war zones were well advised to ensure Red Cross accreditation in the country of service, particularly so if they were citizens of any of the combatant nations. Technically at least this gave them a degree of immunity in the event of capture by the enemy. Otherwise they were themselves at risk of being regarded as combatants, or as spies. Because none of Great Britain's Allies, other than the Americans late in the war, had military medical services on a par with the R.A.M.C., British and other volunteers in various units got up to serve those countries 'under the Red Cross' chiefly worked in what were military hospitals in all but name.

<sup>44</sup> During the Great War V.A.D. 'nurses' provided nursing care alongside fully trained nurses, of whom there were not nearly enough; sometimes leading to friction between the 'professionals' and the 'amateurs'. The movement was founded in 1910 under the auspices of the British Red Cross and the St. John's Ambulance Association. It quickly expanded after the outbreak of war, numbering 80,000 volunteers by 1916.

Following on the foundation of the Territorial Force [T.F.] later the Territorial Army [T.A.] in 1907 as a reserve formation for the British army, the creation of the V.A.D. further reflected the realisation that a major European war was becoming likely, if not inevitable, and that Britain's small standing army and its civilian support services would then gain a vital edge from rapid reinforcement by pre-trained reservists.

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out of a man's sails as to have his wife run off with another woman. Like Butler and Dodds, albeit for an entirely different reason, *The Well's* heroine Stephen was at odds with the current way of the world. It is of passing interest that she too found a measure of fulfilment in voluntary hospital service during the Great War.

Along with some half-dozen other medical teams bound for Serbia, Ogston's left Liverpool for Salonica on an Egyptian steamer the *S.S. Saidieh* on 31<sup>st</sup> March 1915. Butler and Dodds appear not to have been of the party. Butler was certainly still resident in Oxford the following term and had his Mods. finals to sit that summer. The sense of Dodds' account is that they travelled out to join a unit already in being, not with the advance guard.

As his hospital, Troubridge secured the use of a large, modern secondary school, the Third Belgrade Gymnasium; the city was still partially evacuated and it was currently out of use. By Ogston's account: 'Outwardly it had the appearance of a palace and some of its internal parts were simply splendid. It stood in its own grounds of several acres.' The former classrooms and laboratories would make ideal wards and 'there were excellent bathrooms and lavatories.' Troubridge's naval surgeon, had already done 'great work' in fitting it out but it had been used as a barracks during the Austrian occupation and it still required thorough cleaning. That done, it was ready to accept patients from early May.

Ogston then had to escort back to Britain a relation who had come out to the Balkans as one of the unit's staff but had fallen dangerously ill in Salonica. After an unexpectedly difficult return journey *via* Italy, now an Ally having declared war on Austria on 23<sup>rd</sup> May, he arrived back in Belgrade in mid-June. He found the hospital very much under-occupied. 'Its purpose had been to treat patients belonging to the British forces in Serbia, but though it had prescribed for about 700 Serbian outpatients, all of them only slightly ailing, it had no British occupying its beds.' Moreover, 'there seemed to be no prospect of its fulfilling the functions for which it had been created.'

Even if the figure of 700 represents not total patient encounters but all patients known to the hospital, some of whom had been seen on more than one occasion or were still under follow-up, this was indeed an absurdly light workload. Less than half the number of staff could have coped perfectly well. Ogston recommended closure; there was plenty of other voluntary hospital capacity in Belgrade, equally underused, and the duplication of effort was wasteful. He was concerned too by the 'many shocking scandals such as cannot be written down' involving some other British contingents there at the time; he clearly feared that in this unit too, the Devil might find work for idle hands. Troubridge disagreed; his force still required medical cover. There was no telling when fresh sickness might erupt, or when its riverine engagements might lead to casualties. In July Ogston returned home again along with 3 other staff, leaving the remainder to carry on; as Dodds describes, their quiet existence continued until the Austro-German assault.

### Two Irishmen Abroad

Dodds devotes an entire chapter to his and Butler's experiences as would-be non-combatant humanitarians. He gives no dates for their journey out. Some of the experiences he describes *en route* appear to have been his own alone, including an unsuccessful visit to a Maltese brothel and an intense love affair with an attractive, and willing, V.A.D., travelling to join another unit; by implication Butler took life more

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soberly. Once arrived in Serbia they worked together throughout; more in harness perhaps than in complete harmony but Dodds' account largely does for both.

The British Eastern Auxiliary Hospital turned out to be 'a curious little hole and corner affair'. As Sir Alexander Ogston had already found, its intended rôle in supporting the British Naval Mission had come to nothing, or to very little; it was now largely occupied in providing care for the local population. The staff, evidently ill-assorted despite Lady Troubridge's best efforts, comprised a Canadian doctor Dr. Sharpe, 'rough-spoken and coarse-grained', a 'prim' English matron Miss West, 3 trained nurses, 2 V.A.D.s and 4 male orderlies, including Butler and Dodds and Louis Clarke<sup>45</sup>, a 'confirmed bachelor' as it used to be put.

As described in his DNB entry, Clarke was 'of slight build and birdlike speed of mind and pitch of utterance, as well as of bodily movement', although he had 'easy manners and hospitable inclinations'. He later became a distinguished connoisseur and collector of the arts, he was director of the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge 1937 - 1946. Even during his spell in Belgrade he made opportunities to go off collecting; on one occasion returning from as far away as Salonica with two enormous antique brass candlesticks. He later fell ill and had to be shipped back to England.

The orderlies' duties were to assist on the wards and in the outpatients clinic, and with the caterer's daily shopping. In fact there were few inpatients, hence there was little ward work. Off-duty there was time to explore the city and the surrounding countryside. They even found some rough ponies to extend their range. Dodds liked Serbia, and compared the smarter parts of Belgrade favourably with Dublin<sup>46</sup>, which must be taken as praise indeed, but he also describes a sense of disappointment; here they were on the front line, with Austrian troops clearly visible across the Danube, but militarily almost nothing was happening beyond a few sporadic exchanges of shell-fire.

His sense of let-down is understandable; the typhus had very largely been brought under control, the wounded from last year's fighting had long since been dealt with, the expected and wished-for *frisson* of risk was largely absent. Other voluntary medical units in Serbia were also in the doldrums that summer and autumn. Ogston describes the

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<sup>45</sup> Louis Colville Gray Clarke [1881 - 1960] Appearances notwithstanding, he was no mere epicene aesthete. Before and after the Great War he travelled widely and intrepidly on archaeological expeditions and in search of *objets d'art*. Immediately post-war he took a degree in anthropology as a mature student at Exeter College, Oxford. He then transferred his allegiance to Cambridge where in 1922 he became an energetic and effective curator of the University's museum of archaeology and ethnology, and in 1929 a fellow of Trinity Hall. He saw the Fitzwilliam safely and well through the difficult years of the Second World War. His judicious purchases, personal donations and eventually a generous bequest in his will contributed impressively to its collections.

<sup>46</sup> Dr. Elsie Inglis [See footnote 47 below.] an enthusiast for the Serbs themselves, likened them to the Irish. She had worked in Dublin for a time early in her career, so this can be taken as an informed opinion.

Dr. Slavka Mihajlovic a Serb woman doctor writing of her Wartime experiences describes suburban Belgrade pre-War, with an implicit sigh, as: 'a quiet town, its gardens full of sweet-smelling roses, carnations, jasmines and lilacs, with walnut trees branching in the yards, and streets full with the intoxicating smell of lime and acacia blossoms'.

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ill-effects in Belgrade. Dr. Elsie Inglis<sup>47</sup> at Mladnovatz to the south discovered to her consternation that some of her Scottish Women's Hospital nurses had sufficient time on their hands to flirt with similarly under-occupied young Serb army officers. One had to be sent home to preserve the unit's reputation, and whatever remained of her own.

### Crisis & Flight

Of the first few days of October 1915, Lieut. E. Hilton Young<sup>48</sup> one of Troubridge's junior officers writes in his wartime reminiscences: 'They passed in a quiet round of routine duties and of mild social diversions. There were signs that something was going to happen, but not very remarkable signs. People were drifting away from the town. Each day a few more shops were shut, and it became harder to get our hair cut or to buy soap.' Enemy aircraft began to be more in evidence, and the Serb anti-aircraft batteries firing on them were shelled cross-river in return. 'We commented on this revival of aerial and anti-aerial activity, but we did not see in it, as we might have seen, a hint of what was to come.'

All of this changed dramatically on Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup>. Dodds was probably not the friend to whom Butler remarked the day before that the sight of an enemy aeroplane over the city meant 'an air-raid or a bombardment tomorrow' as he was in bed recovering from chicken-pox at the time. His illness notwithstanding, towards noon he was put to preparing the operating theatre and packing personal belongings, as there had been contradictory orders both to treat the wounded and to prepare for flight. As he tells us, by nightfall the ward was full and the kitchen and coal-cellar were crowded with refugees. The roof and yard were thick with shell fragments; it was said that 70,000 shells fell on Belgrade that day, by no means an unlikely total given the weight of enemy artillery drawn up. [470 guns, see below p.25.] The British and other naval missions made such response as they could but there was next to nothing they could do in the face of such a heavy assault.

Butler's description of the conduct and progress of the initial attack is closely consistent with other contemporary accounts. He almost certainly had access to some of the naval personnel, as first-hand witnesses of events which he could not observe himself, he wrote it very soon afterwards while the experience was still fresh, and in later life he showed himself to be notably tidy-minded and methodical. Where there are discrepancies, it is likely to be more reliable than Dodds', written 60 years on. He also lends independent weight to Admiral Troubridge's statement in a later despatch that the bombardment began at dawn on 6<sup>th</sup> October; the *German Official History*, apparently in error, has it beginning at noon.

Other sources confirm Butler's suggestion that although an Austro-German attack was at least half-expected sometime that autumn, the direct assault on Belgrade itself was not.

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<sup>47</sup> Dr. Elsie Maud Inglis [1864 - 1917] Of Scottish descent but born in British India, she trained in medicine in Edinburgh, London and Dublin, at a time when this was still a controversial career for a woman. She became a prominent Edinburgh doctor and suffragist. In 1914, with others, she founded the Scottish Women's Hospitals which sent hospital units under the Red Cross to France, the Balkans and elsewhere throughout the Great War. She herself headed one of these units in Serbia 1915 - 1916, then another in Romania, 1916 - 1917. Days after her eventual return home from Romania in November 1917 she died of cancer.

<sup>48</sup> See footnote 34, p.13.



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A contemporary British account suggests a deliberate German double-bluff. 'So the story runs', from the winter of 1914 onwards the Germans deployed several units as conspicuously as possible along the Danube front, frequently but covertly redeploying them to different points so as to magnify the apparent size of the total force. They then let the Serbs discover what they had been about, so that when reinforcements were brought in it seemed as though these were simply the 'same old units, redistributed'. Butler's account gives further credence to this. Semlin, where German troops were supposed to have been seen on their way to the Italian front, does not lie very convincingly *en route* to that front. Nor was it sensible, if they really were in transit, to permit their presence to be detected, so that the Italians could be forewarned. They could just as easily have been kept a few miles back, out of sight.

In the event it was all somewhat wasted effort. Apparently unknown to the Austrians and Germans, the Serbs had come to a strategic decision to evacuate Belgrade, and to mount no strong defence there, should there be any fresh invasion attempt from the north. During the summer of 1915 men, guns and French spotter aircraft were moved south to the Bulgarian frontier, leaving only 6,000 regular Serb troops and some peasant soldiers, and the tiny Allied contingents, to defend the city.

Admiral Troubridge was highly critical; and reported as much to the Admiralty. Having effectively sealed the Danube by July, with French and Russian support, he correctly saw, as reflected in John Buchan's later account, that he might have in his hands the fate of Constantinople, hotly disputed at Gallipoli since April. To be driven off, relieving the choke point, could have repercussions well beyond the immediate local setback. By then too the Austrians were accumulating pontoons behind the river islands, out of direct view from the shore but readily observable by his waterborne patrols; beyond question a bridging attempt was in prospect. Butler's 'general supposition' of a double crossing was in fact Troubridge's, doubtless conveyed to Butler by the men under his command. Anticipating enveloping attacks, west and east, he laid plans to deploy his forces upstream and downstream to attempt to break these up. Torpedoes could be fired at and mines floated down against pontoon bridges, shellfire could add to the attackers' discomfiture, a spirited defence could create mayhem.

All of this came to nothing in face of the direct assault; perhaps intelligence of Troubridge's intentions, or at least intelligent anticipation, played some part in shaping Austro-German strategy, although there is no direct evidence for that. Whether in fact he could have achieved more than to stave off the inevitable, even with far stronger Serb backing, is questionable. Crucially, other than the naval guns they had no heavy artillery. According to the German Official History the attackers eventually had 470 guns and howitzers, one third of which were of medium or heavy calibre up to 30cm, and including some 42cm mortars. With all of this they could smash up whatever they chose at leisure, from well beyond the defenders' range of retaliation.

Troubridge did not have the luxury of hindsight, nor even a clear overview at the time. Probably from folly in not appreciating their jeopardy, possibly from superior wisdom, or simply by accident, the Serbs appear to have chosen the least bad option, short of surrender perhaps. *In extremis* they arguably did better to retreat south than to permit themselves to become effectively besieged in the north. It was then helpful to have troops

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already deployed to meet the anticipated Bulgarian attack, so as to try to hold open those southward routes by which Allied aid might yet reach them, or by which they might escape. The strategy failed, largely through the weight of the attack, partly because Allied aid came too late and in some measure also, if Troubridge is to be credited, because when push came to shove the Serb troops were rather less committed in their country's defence than contemporary propaganda pretended or than they themselves afterwards liked to believe.

The image with which the Allies comforted themselves that autumn was of 'Gallant Little Serbia', as portrayed in a *Punch* cartoon on 27<sup>th</sup> October, bravely confronting the Kaiser and the Austrian Emperor on a mountain pass, while King Ferdinand of Bulgaria<sup>49</sup> slunk up behind, knife in hand. The story the Serbs liked to tell was of their King Peter<sup>50</sup>, a venerable and well-loved monarch, declaring to his army drawn up around him when all seemed lost: 'Men of Serbia, from your oath to me I now release you, to go to your homes if you will, without dishonour. From your oath to your country, no man can release you. But as for me and my sons, I will stay with you!' And no-one stirred. As for the King, he did indeed stay with them, carried in a litter on their terrible retreat through Albania.

The previous year the Austrians had attacked in haste, expecting a walk-over, with insufficient planning and insufficient forces; and of indifferent quality. They were disastrously repulsed with heavy casualties, and with 40,000 of their troops made prisoners of war<sup>51</sup>. Now, of the total attacking force of 14 army divisions 10 were German, of far

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<sup>49</sup> King, or Tsar, Ferdinand of Bulgaria [1861 - 1948] He was born Prince Ferdinand Maximilian Karl Leopold Maria of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha. He was Prince Regnant, and later King, from 1887. He abdicated in 1918, in the aftermath of Bulgaria's defeat in the Great War. He was well-known as an author, botanist and philatelist, also as a bisexual. He took regular holidays on Capri, then an acknowledged haunt for wealthy gay men. It became the custom for visiting dignitaries seeking his favour to be accompanied by a handsome young equerry. Nonetheless he took his dynastic responsibilities seriously; in 1893 he married Princess Marie Louise of Bourbon-Parma [1870 – 1899] and before her early death they had 4 children; his eldest son later succeeded him as Boris III. [See also footnote 84, p.40.]

<sup>50</sup> King Peter of Serbia [1844 - 1921] He became Serbia's first constitutional monarch following the bloody coup in 1903 in which his predecessor King Alexander, and Alexander's Queen, Queen Draga, were assassinated in the Royal Palace in Belgrade and their bodies hacked to pieces by members of the Black Hand conspiracy, which 11 years later also lay behind the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife, [See footnote 91, p.44.] In June 1914 because of his increasing ill health his second son Alexander was made Regent, but he survived the War and in December 1918 he accepted the monarchy of the newly declared Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, later to become Yugoslavia. On his death Alexander succeeded him. Alexander was himself assassinated by a Macedonian patriot whilst on a state visit to France in 1934.

<sup>51</sup> At the root of Austria's failure in 1914 was that so soon as she began to bombard Belgrade on 29<sup>th</sup> July, Russia mobilised in Serbia's support, so that what had been intended as a crushing, all-out assault was immediately unbalanced and weakened through her unlooked for new commitments on the Russian front.

German support against Russia, as guaranteed by treaty [the Triple Alliance of Germany, Austro-Hungary and Italy] and confirmed by fresh German reassurances that very month, and lacking which the crisis could certainly have been contained, counted for less than it might. Germany's grand strategy, come the general war she had worked for, was to knock out Russia's ally France first before turning her attention eastwards, thus side-stepping the risk of war on two fronts. It was supposed that a rapid French collapse and slow Russian mobilisation, together with all the east-west railway lines laid across Germany in anticipation over the preceding years, would permit a sufficiently swift turnabout.

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tougher metal, and it was shortly to be further supported by a separate Bulgarian attack with 6 divisions from the east; territorial self-interest had finally persuaded Bulgaria to throw in her lot with the Central Powers. Overall the Serbs were outnumbered more than two to one. After the country fell, the Austrians remained as an army of occupation, the German divisions were withdrawn to fight elsewhere. The Austro-German attacks were well-planned and well-prepared, but ultimately their success depended more on weight than on skill. At first the Serbs resisted, inflicting significant casualties, but before long, in Belgrade and country-wide, weight told.

A prime purpose behind the fresh invasion was indeed, as Troubridge saw, to win back unimpeded control of the Danube, being the chief route for commerce and military supply between the Central Powers and Turkey. It would be valuable too to restore the mainline railway link *via* Serbia, although that was less crucial. One of John Buchan's *Greenmantle* characters explains: 'They wanted the railway but they wanted still more the river, and they could make certain of that in a week.' The railway bridge over the Sava at Belgrade had been badly damaged in the course of the earlier Austrian invasion and repairs would take some months, but meanwhile rail traffic was brought across on a temporary pontoon bridge.

The intention was also to punish and to crush. Following the initial bombardment, having cleared the Danube of mines, destroyed the British Naval Mission's and other guns or driven off their crews, and neutralised most other organised resistance, the Austro-German artillery continued to fire into the city, specifically targeting escape routes, and their aeroplanes to drop bombs. Within a few days, viewed from a distance by one of Troubridge's Marine officers, it resembled a smouldering ash-heap, yet bombs and shells were still falling. Troubridge estimated the death toll at 7,000 or more, with unknown numbers injured. Once the invaders were established in control there followed murder and abuse of the civilian population, of Belgrade itself and of Serbia at large, far beyond any military justification.

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Contrary to German expectation, her assault on France *via* Belgium brought Great Britain, and her Empire, into the War too. British involvement helped to ensure what was likely in any case: that France would not easily be crushed but would fight on, tying down the German armies which should soon have sped east. Meanwhile Russia mobilised far more swiftly, then fought far more effectively, than had been supposed possible. With no side holding a decisive advantage, the protagonists were now meshed in mutual deadlock. The cycle of disaster was complete; nothing that followed over the coming four very bloody years was more than an epicycle on the trajectory of tragedy.

The grimmest irony, albeit minuscule in the face of so much else and worse, was that Austria's attempt to swat the Serbian gadfly, which had been the proximate cause of all of this and which originally had the tacit support, or at least the acquiescence, of much of Europe, only Russia vocally dissenting, concluded in abject Austrian humiliation.



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For 48 hours from the afternoon of 6<sup>th</sup> October, Dodds was on duty almost continuously; doubtless so too were Butler and everyone else. By 8<sup>th</sup> October the situation was critical, with the Austrians thought now to be across the Danube, as indeed they were, the telephone dead and no instructions received from the Naval Mission. He says nothing of the evacuees from the British Farmer's Hospital<sup>52</sup>, nor of Dr. Ryan of the American Hospital whose visit Butler records, but a short article in *The Times* of 5<sup>th</sup> November confirms Butler's account

'Miss Ruby Loch<sup>53</sup>, daughter of the late Colonel William Loch<sup>54</sup> C.I.E.<sup>55</sup> has returned to England wounded from Serbia, where she had been nursing and is staying with her mother in Eastbourne. [The nurses' quarters] were established in a camp a few miles out of Pozarevatz and Miss Loch was the first of the party to receive orders to go to Belgrade, where she began work in a spacious hospital. Early in October the besieging forces began to throw shells into the city. ... On October 6<sup>th</sup> one of the shells came through the windows of the hospital and burst. Miss Loch received a wound in the forehead and two orderlies and an interpreter were also wounded.

'After her injury had been attended to, Miss Loch was able to continue her work, but on October 7<sup>th</sup> the hospital had to be abandoned, and the nurses and the patients took refuge in a building<sup>56</sup> in another part of town. Finally the nurses had to leave their patients at the American Hospital and quit Belgrade in the night. [They] had to walk 17½ kilometres to a railway station<sup>57</sup>. ... Miss Loch was subsequently invalided home. She speaks very highly of the valour and devotion of the Serbian soldiers.'

Dodds goes on to describe a council of war called by Dr. Sharpe, who recommended retreat, in which he was supported by the male members of the unit. Miss West and her nurses were determined to remain with their patients and would not budge. 'Reluctantly, out of some schoolboy notion of chivalry, Butler and I then declared that if they insisted on staying, we should stay too. This only enraged them; our offer was angrily refused.'

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<sup>52</sup> The First British Farmers' Hospital was one of 4 wartime hospitals established and maintained in Serbia by the British based Serbian Relief Fund, the other 3 being the Second British Farmers' Hospital at Pojarevatz, Mrs. Stobart's Hospital at Kragujevac and Lady Paget's Hospital at Skopje. The Fund also gave support to several other hospitals and an orphanage.

<sup>53</sup> Ruby B. Loch [*circa* 1885 - ?] was born in Ajmere, India, the daughter of Lieutenant-Colonel William Loch [See footnote 54, below.] and his wife Caroline. Hence at the date in question she was about 30 years old. Post-war in 1919 she married, becoming Mrs. Trafford. No further details have been found.

<sup>54</sup> Lieutenant-Colonel William Loch [1845 - 1912] was British Resident in Kathmandu, Nepal 1899 - 1901. [It was by virtue of a treaty between British India and Nepal that the British were permitted to recruit Gurkha volunteers into the Indian Army.] At his death he was survived by his wife and daughter; a son Granville had predeceased him.

<sup>55</sup> Companion of [the Order of] the Indian Empire.

<sup>56</sup> Very possibly the Naval Mission and its hospital earned a mention in the original draft but the Censor struck this out. They were however acknowledged in *The Times* of 11<sup>th</sup> November. After listing British hospital units operating in Serbia, including the 'British Eastern Auxiliary Naval Hospital at Belgrade', some of which were now known or likely to be in enemy hands, the paper's special correspondent adds: 'The naval hospital at Belgrade appears to have been evacuated before the Austrians entered the town.'

<sup>57</sup> This was most likely at Torlak. Doubtless the two hospital units evacuated together. [See p. 30.]

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At 4.00PM an English officer on horseback brought the Admiral's orders to stay; the orderlies then went out on the streets to collect more wounded. Forthwith a company of Serbian troops appeared who removed all the patients; by Butler's account these were Dr. Ryan's stretcher-bearers. America was still neutral so that Ryan and his staff had no need to fear internment if the invasion succeeded and they clearly intended to stay on: a brave decision as they were at the same risk as everyone else from the shelling, and from stray bullets in any street fighting. Later, America acted as consular proxy for the British government in occupied Serbia, pursuing queries as to the whereabouts and safety of British citizens left behind and so far as possible protecting their interests.

At 6.00PM the Admiral's final order arrived: to evacuate at once. The Hospital staff made their way towards Torlak, 8 miles [13 kilometres] to the south, along with a mob of other refugees; fortunately it was a mild night, but the road was rough and deep with mud. For a long while Dodds and Butler became separated from the others in the press. They also lost their cart with their provisions and personal bundles, which stuck in a ditch and had to be abandoned, although extraordinarily it was recovered and restored to them a few days later.

At Torlak they were unexpectedly met by the motor lorry sent by the Admiral in which they 'travelled the rest of the night in exquisite discomfort'. Next morning 9<sup>th</sup> October they breakfasted on bread and beer in Mladnovatz; behind them that day the Austrians entered Belgrade in force. They travelled on by open rail truck to Chuprija where for 3 nights they shared a 'filthy and verminous' loft with a party of Troubridge's marines whilst discussing the possibility of re-establishing a hospital somewhere behind the lines. It was not to be; the Austrians were still advancing rapidly and on the night of 12<sup>th</sup> October they moved by train to Nish, where they put up at the Resthouse. Dodds, like Butler, records the town's decoration in empty expectation of the arrival of French troops.

### Serbia Abandoned

From the outbreak of war, the Allies had been in doubt how far to involve themselves in the Balkans, and as described earlier<sup>58</sup>, Great Britain and France having agreed in February 1915 to send a joint expeditionary force to Greece and Serbia, Greek reluctance almost at once torpedoed the project. In March/April that year the joint force went to Gallipoli instead. Thereafter with no reinforcements easily to be spared, Serbia was largely left to fend for herself militarily. On a cynical interpretation, Troubridge's Mission and its French and Russian counterparts may have been intended merely as a sop: to boost Serb morale, but as cheaply as possible, just sufficient to keep the country in the War rather than make a separate peace.

But the Central Powers urgently needed to clear the Danube, to secure control of the Balkan railways and to protect their backs; Serbia had to be eliminated from the equation.

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<sup>58</sup> See p. 17 *et seq.*

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The task was entrusted to the German Field Marshall August von Mackensen<sup>59</sup>. Through the summer of 1915, units were removed from the Russian front to create an Army of the Balkans; by mid-September about 10 divisions had been assembled to the north of the Danube and the Save. At the same time the Germans engaged in vigorous diplomatic efforts to woo Bulgaria to their cause. Eventually, despite urgent warnings from his ministers, Tsar Ferdinand of Bulgaria was persuaded to set his people's ancestral rivalry with their Slav neighbours to the west, and the hope of gain, against their undoubted obligation to Mother Russia.

The Serbs, alert to what was afoot, petitioned Britain and France for assistance in mounting a pre-emptive attack on Bulgaria, to get their retaliation in first. Although Bulgarian irregulars were already making hit and run raids on Serbia's railway connections to the south, this was denied. Allied diplomacy still imagined, despite growing evidence to the contrary, that through suitable blandishments and bribes, even including the offer of Serb territory post-war, the Bulgarians could be kept neutral.

When these attempts came to nothing and Bulgaria seemed to be moving inexorably towards an alliance with the Central Powers, a joint Anglo-French expeditionary force under Generals Sir Bryan Mahon<sup>60</sup> and Maurice Sarrail<sup>61</sup> was belatedly sent to Salonica,

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<sup>59</sup> Anton Ludwig August von Mackensen [1849 - 1945] He joined the German army in 1869 and served in the Franco-Prussian War [1870 - 1871]. In 1891 he was promoted to the General Staff in Berlin. There he came under the influence of the Chief of Staff Alfred von Schlieffen [1833 - 1913] originator of the Schlieffen plan for the German assault on France which was eventually put into effect in August 1914. When von Schlieffen retired in 1906 some saw Mackensen as a possible successor; but in the event the appointment went to Helmuth von Moltke 'the Younger' [1848 - 1916].

At the outbreak of war, von Mackensen was appointed to command on the Eastern Front, initially of the XVII Army Corps then, following early successes, of the new Ninth Army. After his further success in Serbia he commanded a multi-national army in Romania, where he was promoted Field Marshal and in 1917 appointed military Governor.

After taking Belgrade, he erected a monument there, commemorating the heroism of the Serb defenders.

Post-war he eventually became a nominal supporter of Hitler and the Nazis but his true sympathies were monarchist. During the Second World War he permitted his disaffection to become so obvious that he was perhaps fortunate to be permitted to die of old age.

<sup>60</sup> General Sir Bryan Mahon [1862 - 1930] He won fame in the Boer War as the reliever of Mafeking. At the outbreak of the Great War, he was appointed to the command of the 10<sup>th</sup> Irish Division which he led at Gallipoli before its transfer to Salonica. He handed over as British commander in Salonica to Lt-Gen George Milne [1866 - 1948] in May 1916. Milne then remained in post until the War's end. Mahon was C. in C. Ireland 1917 - 1918; post-war he became a Senator of the Irish Free State.

<sup>61</sup> General Maurice Sarrail [1856 - 1929] He was a radical socialist and given to political intrigue. From August 1914 he was Commander of the French Third Army. General Joseph Joffre [1852 - 1931] the French C. in C., who disliked him, took the opportunity to remove him from that post the following July in the light of the Third Army's heavy casualty figures. Under political pressure he was then appointed to command French forces in Gallipoli but through changed circumstances he eventually went to Salonica. From January 1916 he was given command of all Allied forces in the region.

Sarrail was retired, as much on political as on military grounds, in December 1917, to be replaced by General Marie Louis Adolphe Guillaumat [1863 - 1940], but following early German successes in their spring offensives in 1918 Guillaumat was swiftly recalled to take charge of the defence of Paris. He was replaced by General Franchet d'Esperry [1856 - 1942] a man 'of tremendous energy and intimidating demeanour' who became known to British troops as 'Desperate Frankie', and who then remained in command until the War's end.

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Greek neutrality notwithstanding, in the hope of discouraging that final step, or at least of mitigating its effects<sup>62</sup>. The first troops disembarked only on 5<sup>th</sup> October 1915, the day on which Butler saw the enemy aeroplane over Belgrade, reconnoitring in advance of the next morning's assault. That same day the Russians, bitter at Tsar Ferdinand's evident impending betrayal of the Slav cause, withdrew their ambassador from Sofia. By then it was clearly far too late to influence Austro-German strategy, to inhibit the Bulgarians from joining in with them, or to mount any effective counterstroke.

The Allies' landings triggered an ongoing political crisis in Greece. Although King Constantine I of the Hellenes<sup>63</sup>, who was popular with his army, favoured continued neutrality, he was broadly pro-German; unsurprisingly so as his wife Princess Sophie of Prussia<sup>64</sup> was the Kaiser's sister and he had himself been educated at Heidelberg University. Nonetheless there was an alliance between Greece and Serbia, which ought to have triggered supportive action, and Greece was a parliamentary democracy. Constantine's prime minister, Eleutherios Venizelos<sup>65</sup>, who enjoyed wide popular support,

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<sup>62</sup> The move was both belated and precipitate. A week later on Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> October Colonel Repington, records in his diary a conversation with Sir William Robertson [1860 - 1933] Chief of the General Staff: 'Viviani [Rene Viviani 1862 - 1925] the French Prime Minister ... came over to the Cabinet last week, and was full of sending 400,000 men to Salonika; but on investigation this plan was ruled out as nothing could be hoped from it within the time available.' Nonetheless, following further discussions between Lord Kitchener [1850 - 1916, Secretary of State for War] and General Joffre: 'The Cabinet yesterday agreed to despatch from France 8 divisions to the Mediterranean. Robertson says that this is the best way to lose the war that he can think of.'

Later in this entry and over the following days, Repington [a well-informed, witness, or at least very well-connected, but not omniscient nor by any means impartial] goes on to describe further, urgent wrangling, both within and betwixt the British and French governments, as to whether and how many troops should be sent, and where: to Salonica or to Gallipoli. On Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> October he records: 'The King reported to be very angry about the decision of the Cabinet.' [to send troops]. On Monday October 18<sup>th</sup>, after a 'tremendous talk' with Lloyd George [See footnote 15, p.9.] Lord Northcliffe [Alfred Lord Northcliffe 1865 - 1922, proprietor of *The Times*, also of the *Daily Mirror*, the *Daily Mail* and the *London Evening News*] and 'Jack' Cowans [Sir John Stevens Cowans 1862 - 1921 Army Quartermaster-General] he concludes: 'I think we all regard Serbia as done for, barring a miracle. We have not enough time to send troops properly organised.'

<sup>63</sup> King Constantine I of the Hellenes [1868 - 1923] He became King in 1913 following the assassination of his father, King George I [grandfather of Prince Philip, the present Duke of Edinburgh]. He reigned until 1917 then abdicated under Allied pressure in favour of his second son Alexander I [1893 - 1920] and went into exile in Switzerland. Following Alexander's death, he accepted an invitation to resume the throne. He again abdicated in 1922, following Greek military defeats against the Turks, to be succeeded by his eldest son, George II [1890 - 1947]. George had an even more troubled reign, much of which he too spent in exile. He is said to have remarked that 'the most important tool for a King of Greece is a suitcase.'

<sup>64</sup> Princess Sophie of Prussia [1870 - 1932] She was the daughter of Crown Prince Frederick of Prussia [1831 - 1888] who was briefly before his death Kaiser Frederick III, and of Crown Princess Victoria [1840 - 1901] Queen Victoria's and Prince Albert's eldest daughter: hence yet another of their many grandchildren. Victoria ['Vicky'] and Frederick had 8 children including the future Wilhelm II of whom 6 survived to adulthood. [See also footnote 89, p.42.]

<sup>65</sup> Eleutherios Venizelos [1864 - 1936] He has been described as 'probably the most significant politician of modern Greece'. He was born on Crete, where he became Prime Minister in 1905. He was Prime Minister of mainland Greece from 1910, but resigned in February 1915 after falling out with King Constantine I over the question of Greek support for the Allies. He was quickly back in power after his party won a landslide victory in the subsequent elections but he was dismissed by the King that autumn after inviting the Allies to land troops at Salonica. He then returned home to Crete where he formed a provisional revolutionary government and, with



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favoured the Allied cause and made the initial offer permitting their forces to land at Salonica, but the resultant friction between himself, the King and the Army eventually led to his dismissal shortly before the landings began. Ill-feeling and division persisted, with a growing risk of civil war: a risk only finally defused by the King's abdication, under Allied pressure, in 1917.

Meanwhile, as a contemporary British account has it: 'The Franco-British expedition from Salonica to the relief of the Serbian army began as somewhat a forlorn hope. The trend of circumstances brought us to a position as unfavourable as it well could be<sup>66</sup>.' At this low point, with the Gallipoli campaign also collapsing, the frustration of Allied strategy in the Eastern Mediterranean theatre, so far as it went, seemed complete.

The crux of the immediate problem was that more had not been done sooner. A larger issue is whether bringing in such British and French forces as might have been spared earlier that summer, and had the Greeks then been more cooperative, would have been sufficient to deter Bulgarian involvement, or to stiffen Serb resistance sufficient to repel the enemy, or even merely to retain a toehold in the south when invasion came, and at what cost. Would the supporting troops merely have become caught up willy-nilly in the eventual rout, to no benefit<sup>67</sup>?

Naturally this crisis in the Balkans was well-covered in the newspapers; Butler's readers would have been familiar in outline with the events in which he had become caught up. Naturally too there were political repercussions; perhaps the surprise is that these were not more serious. For those so-minded, the situation made a useful stick with which to beat all of the Allied governments: both for earlier neglect and for fruitlessly sending troops when it was already too late<sup>68</sup>. A distinction might be drawn between gallant, suffering little Serbia, as promoted by such as Madame Grouitch and as portrayed by some sections of the British press, and Serbia as a geographical entity, inhabited by a contumacious, bloodthirsty people whom in August 1914 even that arch-Liberal Herbert Asquith believed deserved a thrashing<sup>69</sup>, yet whose continued freedom from enemy

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Allied support, planned a coup. This became unnecessary after Constantine's forced abdication in 1917, following which Venizelos returned to power.

At the Versailles Peace Conference he won a good territorial settlement for Greece but despite this and his other achievements, rather like Churchill in 1945, he was defeated in the post-War General Election, in 1920. The new pro-royalist government then invited King Constantine I back to the throne. Venizelos was Prime Minister again in 1924, 1928 - 1932 and 1933. In 1935 he came out of retirement to support another revolt in Crete, but when this failed he was forced into exile in France, where he died the following year.

<sup>66</sup> The author continues, purple with exasperation: 'Intrigue, duplicity, vengeful racialism, passionate blood-lust, weathervane kingcraft, the whole phantasmagoria of Balkan complexity of motive and policy conspired to defeat *Entente* diplomacy.' John Buchan takes a more sober view: 'History will record that our difficulties were great, but that they were surmountable, and that they were not surmounted.'

<sup>67</sup> Dr. James Johnston Abraham [See p.18.] who served as a surgeon in Serbia that year suggests in his autobiography that it was the typhus epidemic which discouraged earlier reinforcement. That had certainly been quelled by midsummer, but with the Allies in any case reluctant to commit too heavily to the Balkans it may have served as a further excuse for inaction.

<sup>68</sup> See in particular Repington's article in *The Times* of 29<sup>th</sup> October 1915: 'England And Serbia. Why Support Has Failed., The Centre Of Gravity.'

<sup>69</sup> See footnote 31, p.13.

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occupation was very much in the British, and French, interest. But either way or both, earlier effective support for the Serbs themselves, if achievable, must have been advantageous.

The actual outcome was the worst possible. For a similar commitment of British and French troops as was eventually made at Salonica, the Balkan railway might still have been denied to the Central Powers and the Danube blockaded. The threat of a cross-Danube thrust into the underbelly of Austro-Hungary must then have tied up at least as many Austrian divisions as were eventually committed to the occupying force. Had Bulgarian involvement not been altogether inhibited by a large Allied presence in Serbia itself, she could scarcely have posed a greater threat or absorbed greater Allied energies in that direction than she did to the south with Serbia occupied.

As for Salonica, and for Greek equivocation, was a campaign *via* Albania wholly inconceivable? At sea there would be a very real threat from the Austrian navy and from Austrian and German submarines, and the harbourage along the Albanian coastline was indifferent, but the naval difficulties were surely no greater than at Gallipoli. On land Albania, though nominally hostile under Austrian sway, was as weak and fragmentary a state as one could hope to find. The local chieftains were surely bribable.

In Britain the Attorney General Edward Carson<sup>70</sup> promptly resigned; following as it did a succession of military and strategic blunders that year, beginning with the Gallipoli landings, the collapse of Serbia was not to be borne. The French Prime Minister Rene Viviani<sup>71</sup> also resigned; the episode had brought to a head growing disagreement between the civil government and the military, as represented by the Army C. in C. 'Papa' Joffre<sup>72</sup>. Amongst the British public, few appear to have taken much active notice. The immediate focus remained on the Western Front where the Battle of Loos was in full swing<sup>73</sup> the largest British battle in the War to date; then there was Gallipoli, with the campaign there

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<sup>70</sup> Edward Henry Carson [1854 - 1935] An Irish protestant born in Dublin and originally a fierce opponent of Home Rule; he described himself as a 'Liberal Unionist'. He studied law in Dublin and was called to the Irish bar in 1877. In 1892 he became Solicitor-General for Ireland and in 1894 an English QC. He acted for the Marquess of Queensberry in the libel action brought against him by Oscar Wilde, another Irishman, in 1895 after Queensberry, discovering Wilde's homosexual relationship with his son Alfred ['Bosie'] publicly described him as a 'sodomite'.

In 1900 Carson was appointed solicitor-general for England. In 1910 he became leader of the Irish Unionist MPs at Westminster. He entered the cabinet as Attorney-General when Asquith formed a coalition government in May 1915. Following his resignation he played a significant rôle in Asquith's eventual fall and his replacement by Lloyd George in December 1916. He was rewarded with a seat in the Cabinet, as First Lord of the Admiralty until his replacement in July 1917 by Sir Eric Geddes [1875 - 1937] then as Minister without Portfolio; at that critical point in the War Lloyd George appears to have preferred to keep him on in a non-job than to risk his potential as an agitator outside the tent.

He had a substantial influence in the eventual partition of Ireland which he both worked for, as the only apparent means to reach a peaceable settlement, and deplored. Butler and Dodds must both surely have understood his dilemma; Lewis too perhaps.

<sup>71</sup> See footnote 62, p.32.

<sup>72</sup> General Joseph Joffre [1852 - 1931]. Joffre had been unenthusiastic over the Salonica expedition.

<sup>73</sup> The Battle of Loos 25<sup>th</sup> September - 19<sup>th</sup> October 1915. Further distracting attention from the Balkans that autumn was the row which erupted as it became apparent that, despite terrible casualty figures, Loos had been a total failure: laid at the door of the British C. in C. Sir John French [1852 - 1925] and leading to his resignation.

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which had begun that spring with such high hopes now all-too-obviously stalemated, then there were the Zeppelin bombing raids, even on London itself. There was too much else to worry about.

Aside from Carson's resignation, Asquith and his administration survived largely unscathed. The following year's crushing blows: final, total failure at Gallipoli, surrender at Kut, disappointment at Jutland, carnage on the Somme and the death there of Asquith's own son, had yet to fall. There were those who already saw Lloyd George as the coming man, but his day was yet to dawn.

With the Bulgarian invasion just a week after their first arrival, the intended deterrent rôle of the Salonica Expeditionary Force at once came to nothing and, as it was scarcely yet suited to any other, its whole *raison d'être* to very little, at least for the time being. The Greeks turned out hostile, or at best vacillating in their support, Salonica as a neutral port, cosmopolitan and seedy, was full of enemy agents, there were obstacles at every turn.

It was some achievement to have 3 French infantry battalions across the border by 15<sup>th</sup> October, but that was a mere 3,000 or so troops and they were already too late. Before long they encountered strong Bulgarian opposition and could make no further progress. They briefly established contact with the retreating Serb army but this was soon severed again by the continued Bulgarian advance. Later British support added little. In the face of a superior enemy and the same atrocious winter weather as was decimating the Serb exodus further north, by 20<sup>th</sup> December the entire force was back in Salonica; it had taken over 6,000 casualties.

Despite this inauspicious beginning, the British Salonica Force and its French counterpart stayed put, reinforcements arrived and before long campaigning began in earnest. But through the continuing need to respect Greek sensitivities, together with the difficulties imposed by terrain, weather, high sickness rates from malaria and dysentery, and a determined enemy, for nearly 3 years the combined force of 600,000 Allied troops, 200,000 of them British, achieved next to nothing. They were effectively stalemated by the Bulgarian army which would otherwise have played little further active part in the War. To their peers fighting hard on other fronts, and unaware of the less pleasant reality, the British troops became known derisively as 'The Gardeners of Salonica'.

Finally in September 1918, reinforced by Serb units determined to win back their homeland at any cost, the Salonica army broke through and drove the enemy out. It was a victory dearly bought, but a victory nonetheless. General Erich Ludendorff<sup>74</sup> later wrote: 'Events on the Bulgarian Front from 15<sup>th</sup> September onwards sealed the fate of the Quadruple Alliance<sup>75</sup>.'

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<sup>74</sup> General Erich Ludendorff [1865 - 1937] A militarist through and through who held that peace was merely the interval between wars. He was Chief of Staff on the Eastern Front 1914 - 1916 and became Quartermaster-General of the German army under General Paul von Hindenburg in August 1916. Thenceforth, until he was forced to resign in October 1918, he was effectively Commander in Chief, with Hindenburg little more than a figurehead. He went on to write numerous books and articles describing and to a substantial degree mythologising Germany's war effort. He was an early and persistent proponent of the view that the German army had not so much been defeated on the battlefield as stabbed in the back by elements at home. He later became a key supporter of Hitler and the Nazis.

<sup>75</sup> The Quadruple Alliance: *ie.* Germany and her then allies: Austro-Hungary, Turkey and Bulgaria.

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### Débâcle & Deliverance

News of the Bulgarian invasion reached Nish on 15<sup>th</sup> October and that night the hospital unit fled south again by train to Skopje, then better known by its old Turkish name, Uskub. Dodds, and doubtless Butler too, 'slept on the floor of the corridor in a tumble of other recumbent bodies'. They reached Skopje on the afternoon of 16<sup>th</sup> October and found somewhere to put up. That evening they learnt that the line northward over which they had just travelled had been cut by the Bulgarians; the line southward was still open, but for how long? While they discussed what to do, news arrived that the last train south was about to leave; they had 20 minutes to repack.

'I found Butler sound asleep in the room we shared. While he dressed with maddening deliberation I hastily packed his things and mine. When he was at last ready it was too late to reach the station: the train had gone and the rest of the unit with it, some still in pyjamas. We were on our own, with the sole company of the Maltese cook.'

The following morning Dodds offered his services to Lady Paget's<sup>79</sup> Hospital which was still operating in Skopje, but it had little real work for him. From Butler's account it seems clear that this was a joint offer, and a joint rejection. Is there, perhaps, an element of self-justification in his rehearsal of this and the other offers of service, which could not possibly have been accepted in the circumstances then prevailing? Perhaps even when he wrote his letter the full implications of Serbia's collapse had not yet sunk in.

They then discovered that in yesterday's panic their own unit had left most of its remaining equipment behind and much private property too. There turned out still to be trains running south after all and with some difficulty, struggling with the mass of recovered luggage, they reached Salonica, together with the Maltese cook, at 3.30AM on 19<sup>th</sup> October after a 24 hour journey. They survived on eggs, which were the only food they could buy in Skopje and which they swallowed raw, and a bottle of unidentified alcoholic liquor which turned out on closer inspection to be full of dead flies. They strained it through a handkerchief into a hot-water bottle and drank it out of that.

During the retreat, Admiral Troubridge kept a private journal<sup>76</sup>, in which he set down an outline of events as they occurred, or at least as they appeared; with resistance crumbling and lines of communication breaking down it is no surprise that beyond those in which he was directly involved his information was usually imperfect and sometimes entirely in error. He included too some very forthright comments, clearly borne of frustration, sometimes of misinformation too, so that these may or may not all be strictly just.

For a week, 18<sup>th</sup> - 25<sup>th</sup> October he based himself at Chuprija. He still hoped to contribute something to the rearguard action but as he told Colonel Malcolm<sup>77</sup>, Chief of Staff of the

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<sup>76</sup> Troubridge is believed to have kept journals throughout his career, of which only two have survived, covering his service in the Balkans during the Great War. Of these the first, concerning the Serbian episode 1915 - 1916, is reproduced in full in Fryer C, *The Destruction of Serbia in 1915*. [See Booklist.] Both are now in the Imperial War Museum.

<sup>77</sup> Sir Neill Malcolm [1869 - 1953] In September 1915 he was appointed G.S.O.1 of the Salonica army and in November 1915, Brigadier-General, General Staff to the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force. In April 1916 he removed from the Mediterranean theatre to become B.G.G.S. to the new Reserve Army on the Western Front, later the Fifth Army, commanded by Sir Hubert Gough.

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British division just landed in Salonica who had come up country on a fact-finding mission, with the rivers all in the enemy's hands his own job was at an end. On 19<sup>th</sup> October he wrote: 'Our hospital is safe at Skopje under Lady Paget's wing.', but his news was out of date; by then it had reached Salonica. This he learnt on 23<sup>rd</sup> October: 'If Skopje has fallen into Bulgarian hands I am glad they have got safely away, but if not I am truly sorry they left as it seems they had no orders to do so and I had placed them under Sir Ralph Paget's<sup>78</sup> orders. I ... much fear Sharpe has lost his head again.' The pity was, he went on, that the Serbs had considered giving them a special medal for staying in Belgrade to the bitter end, 'which was entirely my doing' but as they had left against orders while Lady Paget<sup>79</sup> had stayed, all talk of that was 'gone and finished'<sup>80</sup>.

Later in the same day's entry he amended his criticism, in the light of information just received that the Bulgarians had taken Skopje unopposed the previous morning, 22<sup>nd</sup> October: 'I am glad this shows our hospital was right to move and hope they had time to take my things with them which I left in their charge.' What these were, and whether they were indeed taken, or included amongst the *impedimenta* gathered up in arrears by Butler and Dodds, there can be no telling.

On 29<sup>th</sup> October, now at Krusevac, he devotes a paragraph to lambasting 'this hospital business in Serbia'; it has allowed 'any woman' to arrive with 'a "unit", which apparently is under no-one's control. ... Sir Ralph Paget was sent out as Red Cross Commissioner to try to evolve some order, but it seems no-one need obey him.' The objects of his ire were the large numbers of woman volunteers still in the country, including Dr. Elsie Inglis whom he singles out for particular criticism, who were now at high risk of internment, or worse, but who would not accept sensible instructions, as Troubridge saw it, to make their way to safety or to join in such co-ordinated relief efforts as were still feasible. 'My hospital being under my direct orders got safely out, but no others have, for various foolish, feminine, sentimental reasons.'

In truth, his judgement is equally questionable in either direction. His hospital was under his protection and under an implicit obligation to heed his wishes, but as a body of civilian

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<sup>78</sup> Sir Ralph Spencer Paget [1864 - 1940] He became the son-in-law of Sir Arthur and Lady Paget [See below, footnote 79] on marrying their daughter, his distant cousin Louise Margaret Leila Wemyss Paget, in 1907. He joined the British Diplomatic Service and as the latest of many appointments he was Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary to Belgrade 1910 - 1913. He was then Assistant Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs 1913 - 1915 but returned to Serbia as Chief Commissioner of the Red Cross 1915 - 1916. For his services there he was decorated with the Order of the White Eagle of Serbia [1<sup>st</sup> class].

<sup>79</sup> Lady Arthur Paget [1865 - 1919] *née* Mary Stevens, daughter of Paran Stevens of Boston, Massachusetts. She and her husband, General Rt. Hon. Sir Arthur Henry Fitzroy Paget [1851 - 1928], were married in 1878. She became a leading society hostess and a patroness of the arts. During the Boer War she equipped a hospital ship, the *Maine*, for British forces serving in South Africa. Her husband was later appointed Minister at Belgrade, she joined him there and during the First & Second Balkan Wars [October 1912 - May 1913 & June - July 1913] she devoted herself to hospital work in Serbia. During the Great War she ran a hospital in Skopje for the Serbian Relief Fund 1914 - 1916; she herself caught typhus in the epidemic which followed the first Austrian invasion, but recovered. [See p.11.]

<sup>80</sup> In the event, with Skopje about to fall to the invaders and all the southward routes now cut, Sir Ralph Paget, with a party of nurses from another unit, soon joined the general retreat westward to the Albanian ports. Lady Paget and her hospital stayed behind and were temporarily interned. See below p.39 *et seq.*

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volunteers it was in no true sense 'under his direct orders', nor could he put it under Sir Ralph Paget's 'orders'. Dr. Sharpe and the rest were fully entitled to assess the situation for themselves, and to bow out if they concluded that the risks of staying on outweighed any good they were likely to do. At the same time, if Dodds and Troubridge are to be believed, perhaps they did not so much bow out as cut and run; perhaps Sharpe did indeed 'lose his head'. It certainly seems a poor showing to have left his two young orderlies behind, still more the cook. Having put the women safely aboard the 'last' train ought he not to have stayed behind, to seek the stragglers out and see them safe too?

In her Second Report on her hospital's experiences Lady Paget provides a different perspective: 'On the morning of 16<sup>th</sup> October the hospital staff of the British Naval Mission at Belgrade arrived at Skopje bringing with them Lieut. Hilton Young<sup>81</sup> who had been wounded and two wounded Marines. They reported that the railway bridge at Vranja had been blown up by the Bulgarians an hour after their train had passed. As the day wore on the news became graver and both the telephone and the telegraph lines between Nish and Skopje were cut.'

That evening she saw the Serbian Governor in Skopje, then held a council of war with her own and the Naval Mission's senior staff around Lieut. Young's hospital bed. She and her unit had already elected to stay put rather than abandon their patients and their other relief work. Nonetheless, persuaded by Lieut. Young, she agreed to go by train to Salonica forthwith, even at this eleventh hour, to put the case for military intervention to the British and French Generals there; although she herself had little expectation of success. 'So that night, accompanied by Lieut. Young, the wounded Marines and the hospital staff

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<sup>81</sup> According to Fryer in *The Royal Navy on the Danube* [See Booklist.] Hilton Young was not in fact wounded but suffering from acute appendicitis. In his own wartime reminiscences he gives a detailed description of his experiences at one of the Naval Mission's mine and torpedo outstations, at Semendria 40 miles downstream from Belgrade, 6<sup>th</sup> - 9<sup>th</sup> October 1915, where the Austrians also made a cross-river assault in strength, preceded by a fierce artillery bombardment. He and his party then received Troubridge's orders to fall back to Chuprija. He confirms that he took sick there the day after his arrival and was then sent a 2 days' journey south to Lady Paget's hospital at Skopje, along with two wounded marines from Belgrade, but he says nothing of his diagnosis. He was educated at Eton and Trinity College Cambridge. He read for the Law and in 1904, like Butler after him, he was called to the Bar by Inner Temple. [See p.47.] He went on to practise the law, also to write. At the outbreak of war he joined the R.N.V.R. and he was soon on active service, on *HMS Iron Duke*. He eventually rose to the rank of Lieutenant-Commander. Serving as a gunnery officer on H.M.S. *Vindictive* in the Zeebrugge raid in 1918 he was severely wounded. In the Archangel Campaign 1918 - 1919 he commanded an armoured train. In 1919 he was awarded the DSO.

In 1915 he found time to contest a by-election as Liberal candidate for Norwich and was elected MP. Post-war he continued to write but he also pursued an active political career. In 1922 he was Chief Whip for the Lloyd George Liberals and that year too he was made a Privy Counsellor. In 1926 he joined the Conservatives. He continued to represent Norwich until the 1929 general election, when he was elected MP for Sevenoaks. In 1931 he succeeded Neville Chamberlain [1869 - 1940] as Minister of Health and served as such in Ramsay MacDonald's National Government until MacDonald's resignation in 1935. Later that year he was created 1<sup>st</sup> Baron Kennet.

In 1922 he married the sculptress Kathleen Scott, née Bruce, widow of Captain Sir Robert Falcon Scott, of Antarctica.

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of the Naval Mission, I left Skopje for Salonica. We arrived about mid-day on 17<sup>th</sup> October<sup>82</sup>.'

Leaving the Naval Hospital to make its own way she went to see the British and French Generals, but to no avail<sup>83</sup>, save that General Mahon gave her two large motor lorries, to assist her unit's escape if they had second thoughts. The following day she took the 7.00AM train back to Skopje, but the lorries were ordered off at the Greek frontier as it was overloaded beyond the capacity of the Serbian engine waiting to take it on.

At Veles on the way north there were scenes of outright panic at the station, with women and children trampled underfoot as frightened refugees tried to get aboard the last trains. She arrived back in Skopje at 10.30PM. By now the Bulgarians were at the gates, there was no possibility of effective defence and the Serb army was pulling out. There too the station and the roads were choked with refugees. The weather was cold and soaking wet, the mud atrocious. The itinerant Albanians were beginning to loot. 'Chaos reigned.'

At first reading, Lady Paget's account seems contrary to Dodds'. She describes the Naval Hospital fleeing south, but apparently in good order. She accompanied them on their onward journey on 16<sup>th</sup> - 17<sup>th</sup> October, which was decided upon only after joint discussion, and although there was every need for haste there is no suggestion that this was the last train. As is obvious though, the unit's ordinary personnel had very little notice of their fresh move, so soon after their arrival and with the Bulgarian army blowing up the bridges at their heels: hence no doubt any sense of panic, hence too Butler and Dodds and the cook, and so much of their gear, left behind.

As to whether Dr. Sharpe owed the strays a duty of care, he could justly counter that they were well capable of looking after themselves, as indeed they quickly demonstrated, and that in any event Lieut. Young and the two wounded men had first claim on his attentions.

When Skopje fell to the Bulgarians on 22<sup>nd</sup> October Lady Paget and her unit were largely well-treated, although they faced increased aggravation later after the Germans arrived. They were permitted to continue their hospital work, caring for the sick and wounded of both sides, and their general relief efforts on behalf of the townspeople and the refugees. That winter famine followed the invasion and when she learnt of the desperate conditions

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<sup>82</sup> Hilton Young continues his own story: 'We came safely to Salonica where I and the marines were sent on board a hospital ship which had just arrived there, for us in the nick of time. A week or two later I was sent home in an empty transport, and went to Haslar Hospital [Haslar Royal Naval Hospital at Gosport, Hampshire]. The doctors there. cured me and let me go, and at the end of November I found myself at Brindisi, on my way back to join the Admiral and the Mission.' He played a part in the evacuation from Albania, eventually making his own escape back to Brindisi on board an Italian destroyer on 20<sup>th</sup> January 1916.

The Naval Mission then returned home to Britain, where it was kept in being for a further 6 weeks in the hope that it might be of further service to the Serb army on the Macedonian front after the army's transfer from Corfu to Salonica. When realisation dawned that there was no prospect of any early movement on that front it was wound up.

<sup>83</sup> See above, p.35. Although General Sarrail lost no time sending French troops forward they first saw action against the Bulgarians only on 21<sup>st</sup> October.

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in Skopje, Queen Eleonore<sup>84</sup> of Bulgaria sent a generous contribution to their relief fund. At Lady Paget's petition she also used her influence to expedite the unit's repatriation.

They were eventually evacuated to Sofia on 17<sup>th</sup> February 1916, thence *via* Russia, arriving back in Britain on 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1916. They smuggled home with them a substantial sum in French gold coinage, purchased covertly from the Skopje merchants for paper money at a highly advantageous rate in the face of impending confiscation.

Dr. Elsie Inglis and part of her Scottish Women's Hospitals unit at Krusevac, Dr. James Berry and his Royal Free Hospital unit at Vrnitse and some others were also captured and interned by the invading forces, eventually to be repatriated in the early months of 1916, but they travelled *via* Austria and Switzerland. Lady Paget took pains to avoid Austria as about the time she was due to leave, the Austro-Swiss border was closed. The only other onward route lay *via* Germany and she greatly feared that once on German territory her male orderlies at least would not be permitted to leave again.

John Buchan, well-informed as always, had his fictional hero Richard Hannay observe a group of British Red Cross nurses in the custody of Austrian troops as he passed through Belgrade in early January 1916. As to conditions there, the riverside area was 'battered' but 'the upper streets of the city were still fairly whole.'

Internment that winter was unpleasant, with the future uncertain, the weather bitter and food and fuel short, but the hospital teams were not in close custody and they were all permitted to continue their medical work. Others besides Lady Paget found the Austrians and Bulgarians to behave pleasantly enough, on the whole, unlike the Germans who were more threatening. There were eventual compensations; one party returning home *via* Vienna were permitted to go on a shopping trip, escorted by a charming young Austrian subaltern, and were disappointed only when an embarrassed shopkeeper refused to sell them some patriotic badges inscribed: '*Gott strafe England!*'

In Salonica Butler and Dodds rediscovered their unit at the *Hotel Continentale*, and in terminal disarray. Dr. Sharpe blamed Miss West for what Dodds describes as 'the panic flight' from Skopje; Miss West blamed Dr. Sharpe; both sides claimed Dodds and Butler as witnesses in their favour. The unit 'had lost its *raison d'être*, its morale and the bulk of its equipment, and was in addition penniless'. Most of the women returned home by the next available ship, save only 3 nurses who stayed on, hoping to find employment with the Expeditionary Force. That hope was doubtless fulfilled as the Force was steadily increasing in numbers and sickness rates were high. Aside from squalid conditions in Salonica itself, many of the men had transhipped from Gallipoli, bringing dysentery and other illnesses with them. Before long there would be battle casualties to deal with too, and frostbite.

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<sup>84</sup> Eleonore Caroline Gasparine Louise, Princess Reuss-Köstritz [1860 - 1917] She became the second wife of Tsar Ferdinand of Bulgaria and Tsaritsa of Bulgaria in 1908. [See footnote 49, p.26.] She was described as 'a plain but practical, capable and kind-hearted woman'. Following the death of his first wife, Ferdinand sought about for a new consort to assist him in his regal duties, but with his homosexual leanings and with no requirement to produce further heirs, he stipulated that she should not expect affection or attention. It is supposed that Eleonore had been discretely informed of his sexual tastes and it is doubtful whether the marriage was ever consummated. He did indeed neglect her throughout. She came into her own, and won the approbation of her people, working as a nurse during the Balkan and Great Wars.



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The men were sent to the British Naval Base at Mudros Bay on the Greek island of Lemnos<sup>85</sup>, the Allies' forward base and staging post for the Gallipoli expedition; there they were accepted on board the hospital ship *Aquitania*<sup>86</sup>, on condition that they worked their 6 day passage home as nursing orderlies. 'The voyage was no picnic. The ship was tightly packed with fever cases from Gallipoli', and whilst in Belgrade they had learnt little of enemas and catheters. They ate and slept in the hold and worked 13 hour days. Conditions were filthy. Dodds quotes from his own diary: 'My hands are usually covered with patients' excrement and I have ceased to worry about eating meat off someone else's porridge plate or finding my coffee full of cigarette ends.'

### Reasons to be Thankful

At last they reached England. Dodds spent a weekend in Oxford with a friend, then a month's holiday in Donegal recuperating. Butler, of whom he says nothing more, presumably did similarly. It had not been an altogether glorious episode from first to last, but at least they had tried.

Despite the rigours and anxieties of their journey, Butler and Dodds were also fortunate to have escaped so easily. Balked by the Bulgarian invasion beginning on 11<sup>th</sup> October, which soon cut all the southward routes, the Serbian military retreat and the accompanying mass exodus of civilians which had developed ahead of the Austrians and Germans advancing from the north then made their way westward towards the Adriatic ports.

Figures are disputed but at least 200,000 souls, probably closer to 300,000, including a large part of the Serb army, King Peter and his staff, boys, women and children, many Austrian prisoners of war captured in earlier fighting, Admiral Troubridge and his naval contingent, Sir Ralph Paget and his party of nurses, the rump of the S.W.H. unit, and assorted other foreign nationals, trekked out over the Albanian mountains through snow and ice in the middle of winter: a distance of 150 miles [240 Km] or more dependant on the route taken, and with a climb and descent both of at least 6,000 feet [1,830 metres].

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<sup>85</sup> During the Gallipoli and Salonica campaigns, this fine natural harbour, its entrance protected by submarine nets, was constantly busy with Allied shipping. A contemporary account, by a British naval surgeon passing through in April 1915 as the Gallipoli campaign got underway describes: 'an enormous assemblage of ships there - both British and French, of every kind - battleships, cruisers, destroyers, submarines, huge transports, store ships, colliers, [Much shipping, merchant and naval, was still coal-fired.] auxiliaries of all sorts, two white-painted hospital ships, trawlers and tugs. At the top of the harbour lay the little white town of Mudros, with its white, twin-towered Greek church, and its row of spidery windmills on the ridge behind.'

<sup>86</sup> The *Aquitania*, nicknamed 'The Ship Beautiful' for her handsome lines, was a Cunard liner, launched in April 1913. As stipulated by the British Admiralty, which subsidised Cunard to that end, she was designed to be converted into an armed merchant cruiser at need. She was requisitioned as such by the British Government at the outbreak of war, then served as a troopship in support of the Gallipoli campaign, then briefly as a hospital ship from December 1915 through January 1916, before reverting to troop transport.

Another Old Carthusian, 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant Edwin Cawston [1896 - 1928] joined the R.A.S.C. and served with the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force. In November 1915 in a letter to *The Carthusian* from Lemnos Base he wrote: 'The *Mauretania* and the *Aquitania* are hospital ships, and come in periodically, taking off about 5,000 dysentery cases at a go.' The *Aquitania's* peacetime capacity was just 4,192 passengers and crew, so that she would indeed, as Dodds goes on to remark, have been 'tightly packed', but later in the War, as a troopship, she once transported over 8,000 men.

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Amongst those foreign nationals was Madame Grouitch<sup>87</sup>: 'For three months, October, November and December 1915, we tramped over those terrible mountains of Albania without food, without shelter, leaving thousands of dead by the roadside<sup>88</sup>.' One of the S.W.H. nurses records: 'To add to the horrors of the retreat, there fell upon the mountains in that December one of the worst snow-storms for decades, and then was the pathway indeed bordered by death.' There are many other similar eye-witness accounts, of cold, hunger and privation, and the mountain tracks littered with bodies.

Perhaps 100,000, but with a similar margin of uncertainty, died along the way from exposure, starvation, sickness and accidents, or were killed in skirmishes with the Albanians; there was little love lost between these Balkan neighbours. Taken altogether, including the casualties from the earlier, failed Austrian invasion and the epidemics which followed, by the end of 1915 Serbia had lost one-sixth of its pre-War population: some 500,000 - 600,000 dead out of 3½ million.

The eventual seaborne evacuation to Italy and Corfu, in the organisation of which Admiral Troubridge played a key rôle, was the largest such before Dunkirk. Dr. Ryan, formerly of the American Hospital in Belgrade, also became involved in the relief effort. About 150,000 Serbian soldiers were got away, with an unknown number of civilians.

### Self-inflicted Wounds

However much sympathy the Serbs deserved for their sufferings, they were largely the authors of their own misfortunes. First and worst, through their persistent, incontinent goading of Austro-Hungary and the eventual outrage at Sarajevo, they had brought down war upon their own heads, and throughout Europe and the whole world; although they could not justly be held to account for the wider disaster. The blame there was Germany's; specifically it belonged to Kaiser Wilhelm II<sup>89</sup> who, uniquely, had the power to

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She was again used as a troopship in the Second World War. She was scrapped in 1950.

<sup>87</sup> See footnote 24, p.12.

<sup>88</sup> Madame Grouitch is referring to the Serb nation as a whole; even at worst, individuals could complete the journey in less than 3 months, if they completed it at all. *The Times* reports one party of Scottish nurses as setting out from Kraguievatz on 15<sup>th</sup> November and arriving at Scutari on the Albanian coast, after great hardships, on 11<sup>th</sup> December. They then had to wait a week for passage to Italy.

<sup>89</sup> Kaiser Wilhelm II [1859 - 1941] He was one of Queen Victoria's many grandchildren, through his mother Princess Victoria ['Vicki'] the British Princess Royal. [See also footnote 64, p.32.] Through her too, King Edward VII was one of his uncles, Empress Alexandra of Russia, married to Tsar Nicholas II, was a cousin. The tale of dynastic inter-relationships is long. A traumatic breech birth left him with a permanently weak, atrophic left arm [from damage to the nerves of the brachial plexus: Erb's palsy] which he tried to conceal. It has been suggested that he may have also have suffered intrapartum brain damage.

He became Kaiser in 1888 following the deaths of both his grandfather Wilhelm I [1797 - 1888] and his father, briefly Frederick III, earlier that year. A British ENT surgeon Sir Morell Mackenzie [1837 - 1892] who became involved in Frederick's care through the intervention of Vicki and her mother, was later made a scapegoat by the German establishment and press for his untimely death, from carcinoma of the larynx. Not a little of the ill-feeling rubbed off onto Vicki herself, and onto the British Queen. The episode was one of many sources of friction between the two nations over the years leading up to the Great War, but significantly too it was a source of personal upset for the new Kaiser.

Through diplomatic blundering but also through a fixed ambition to see his country on top no matter what, arguably too through a personal inferiority complex *vis-à-vis* his British relatives, Wilhelm II fostered the growth

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save the situation at the last, and earlier might have done much to prevent its development, but chose instead to fan the flames.

They shared blame with the Bulgarians for the longstanding enmity between their two nations, inflamed afresh by the recent Balkan wars, which the Austrians and Germans exploited through 1915 so as to bring about the Bulgarian attack in their support that autumn. It would have been in the better interests of both sides to reach a working rapprochement and to keep the peace, but their differences ran too deep and for the Bulgarians the lure of short-term gains proved too attractive.

The Serbs' trouble with the Albanians as they fled was self-inflicted too. There was a long tradition of feud between the two peoples, which the Serbs maintained without compunction. Describing his experiences in the Balkans in 1914, Aubrey Herbert<sup>90</sup> wrote: 'Vengeance is sown in the soil. ... Accuse the Serb of having put to death 500 Albanians ... and the fiery Serb will reply proudly that such is not the case; his gallant countrymen have done better than that: from a thousand to twelve hundred Albanians have been massacred.'

Albania traditionally owed allegiance to Turkey, but more recently to Austria which was determined to maintain an Albanian state as a buffer against Serbia, to deny her direct access to the Adriatic. Nonetheless the latest Balkan wars in 1913 moved the border between the two to the west, to Serbia's advantage and to Albania's detriment. Following on from this the Serbs expelled any remaining Albanians from their newly acquired territories, expropriating their land: what is now termed ethnic cleansing, although the process is doubtless as old as civilisation. They displayed no greater generosity of spirit following their deliverance in 1918. Mother Theresa of Calcutta came to be there because her Albanian family was driven from its home in southern Yugoslavia in the 1920's.

In June 1915, even with the enemy at the gates, the Serb army, supported by their Montenegrin allies, occupied Albania with the intention of seizing territory and ports which might be retained post-war, but had swiftly to be withdrawn again in face of the growing threat to Serbia itself. Along the way they took the opportunity to commit further atrocities against the Albanian tribesmen, which were to be repaid with interest a few months later.

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of national ill-will which eventually precipitated the Great War. Whether he really intended or wanted war has been endlessly debated ever since, but his culpability cannot be doubted. In 1918 he was forced to abdicate as part of the peace settlement. Later he disliked Hitler personally but admired his achievements. He requested that the swastika and other Nazi regalia should not be displayed at his funeral, but the request was ignored.

<sup>90</sup> Aubrey Nigel Henry Molyneux Herbert [1880 - 1923] was a traveller, diplomat and writer and was said to have been John Buchan's model, along with T.E. Lawrence [of Arabia] for Sandy Arbuthnot in *Greenmantle*. For much of his life he was almost blind. Thanks to his tireless work in the cause of Albanian nationalism, in 1913 he was asked whether he would be prepared to accept the throne of Albania, if it was formally offered to him. He was keen to accept but Herbert Asquith, the Prime Minister and Sir Edward Grey [1862 - 1933] the Foreign Secretary, advised against. He spent much of the Great War in intelligence work in Mesopotamia, Salonica, and Italy.

If Auberon Waugh who wrote his D.N.B. entry is to be believed, in 1923 his old college tutor advised him that the best cure for blindness was to have all his teeth extracted: following which advice he developed blood poisoning and died.

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More deeply damaging than the age-old culture of feud and vengeance was the Serbs' new inspiration and justification for all of this. With the collapse of the Ottoman Empire almost every scrap of territory in the Balkans came to have at least two rival local claimants, but there was worse to the Serbs' self-seeking aggression than mere beggar-my-neighbour. They demanded hegemony, as of right. Like the Russians to whom they looked for support, like their close allies in Montenegro, but also like their sworn enemies the Bulgars, they were ethnic Slavs. Lying behind the assassinations at Sarajevo was pan-Slavism, their widely-held ambition to unite all Slavs in the Balkans and in the south-eastern provinces of Austro-Hungary into one nation: Yugoslavia. In every essential this was fascism, Nazism, a few years before those terms were coined, convinced of the superiority and unique destiny of the Slav race and despising all others. Where that eventually led, even as recently as the 1990's, is still shameful to recall.

Unlike Gavrilo Princip [1894 - 1918] who fired the fatal shots, and who eventually died in prison of TB, Vaso Cubrilovic<sup>91</sup>, another of the Sarajevo conspirators, survived his sentence to become a historian, teacher and politician. A vigorous proponent of ethnic cleansing, about 1937, as the German Nazis pursued their ill-treatment of the Jews which eventually culminated in the Holocaust and the world did too little, too late, he wrote: 'If Germany could deport tens of thousands of Jews, the expulsion of a few hundreds of thousands of Albanians would not lead to a world war<sup>92</sup>.' Like-minded pan-Slavists urged the expulsion of all 'racially inferior' Hungarians, Croats, Jews, Albanians, Catholics and Muslims from a purified Greater Serbia, stretching from Italy to the Aegean, as Serbia had of old.

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<sup>91</sup> Vaso Cubrilovic [1897 - 1990] was the youngest of the six would-be assassins ranged along the Archduke Franz Ferdinand's route in Sarajevo on 28<sup>th</sup> June 1914. Playing a key supporting rôle was his elder brother Veljko Cubrilovic, 'the local teacher Cubrilovic' as he is described in the Austrian official report, who assisted in bringing them undetected into and through Bosnia from Serbia.

Vaso was an early and enthusiastic recruit into the original core group of conspirators, disaffected Bosnian Serbs, who then sought backing from the Narodna Odbrana [Peoples' Defence] movement: one of a number of patriotic movements operating openly in Serbia itself at the time, all fiercely anti-Austrian and prepared to use violence at need. This came to the ears of the Black Hand, a far more deadly, secret society, whose head Colonel Dragutin Dimitrijevic, known as 'Apis', was also chief of Serbian military intelligence. It was through Black Hand and its adherents that the conspirators were supplied with hand grenades and Browning pistols from the Serb army arsenal at Kragujevac, also with cyanide tablets to use at need, and given shooting lessons at the military range at Topcider; but for that support it seems very doubtful whether the plot could have come to fruition.

After the event almost all of those immediately involved were swiftly rounded-up by the Austrian authorities. Either they did not take their cyanide tablets, or the tablets proved ineffective. Veljko Cubrilovic and a few others were sentenced to death and executed. Those under 20, as most of them were including Vaso and Princip, were exempt from the death penalty and received long prison sentences. But by mid-1918, as he describes in a letter to his sisters, of seven known to Vaso, five including Princip had died from TB or other illness, one from a severe beating. Vaso himself, and Popovic the other survivor were released by the Allies at the end of the War.

Vaso Cubrilovic became a national hero and after the Second World War he served as a minister in Marshall Tito's Yugoslav government. His last wish was to be buried in honour alongside his old accomplices at the Field of Blackbirds, the Serbs' ancient battlefield in Kosovo [See footnote 29, p.13.] but by then the Yugoslav state which they had helped to create was collapsing once more into bloody chaos, and the wish remained unfulfilled.

<sup>92</sup> Both the German Nazis and the Serbs had also before them the recent example of Turkey's Armenian genocide, which had excited little international protest and no effective action.

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Like today's Israelis, or Palestinians, or Tamils, or Chechnyans, or elements in the Muslim diaspora, or yesterday's Irish, North and South, and many more, and with a similar, qualified, claim on the world's sympathies, the Serbs responded to their embattlement by loving their tribe too much, at others' expense, and ultimately at their own too.

### Ambition Frustrated

Initially Serbia and France were the chief recipients of Red Cross support and most of the British-based units went to Serbia. With its fall, opportunities for volunteers diminished for the time being, and many of the remaining units elsewhere were preponderantly or exclusively staffed by women.

So soon as he was fit again, Dodds applied for a post as orderly at the Anglo-Russian Hospital in Petrograd<sup>93</sup>. He was perhaps unaware that this was an altogether larger and more professionally organised enterprise, which was unlikely to require the services of a rank amateur. It was brought into being over the latter half of 1915 and officially opened at the Dmitri Palace in Petrograd on 1<sup>st</sup> February 1916. Subsidiary field hospitals and a motor ambulance column were later established, but even at its largest, about November 1917, with 22 doctors and surgeons, over 60 nurses and V.A.D's and 18 ambulance drivers, it still had only 4 male orderlies. Dodds was put on the waiting-list, with no early prospect of a place. 'So in January 1916 I returned *faute de mieux* to my interrupted studies at Oxford.'

Whether he or Butler had intended to stay out for longer, for a full year perhaps or for the duration of the War, there is no record; quite likely they had not yet made any firm decision. Nor is there any record whether Butler made further enquiries of his own. 'Under present conditions' of enemy occupation it was not so much 'very doubtful' as entirely inconceivable that any more hospital units would be sent out to Serbia. After his enforced return home he may very well have concluded that he had fulfilled the demands of honour, but it is easy to imagine some further heart-searching as he settled back into a nearly empty College, with most of his contemporaries at the Front, or already casualties<sup>94</sup>.

### An Ulsterman's Impressions

As Irishmen Butler and Dodds were not subject to conscription<sup>95</sup> when this was introduced in 1916. By the Military Service Act 1916 'every male British subject who has attained the age of 18 and is ordinarily resident in Great Britain' was liable for enlistment, but there was exemption for men resident 'for the purposes of education only'. Potentially the same exemption also applied later to C.S. Lewis, but he had no reason to share his Nationalist compatriots' objections and in the event he appears to have felt no reluctance to join up, or at least he accepted the inevitable philosophically. About Christmas 1916, after he had won his place at University College, the Master wrote to him clearly indicating that this was now his first duty: that it was a 'moral impossibility' for a healthy man over 18 years of age, as he now was, to come into residence at Oxford.

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<sup>93</sup> Later under the Communists Leningrad, now once again Petrograd, or St. Petersburg.

<sup>94</sup> Of 30 other boys who entered Charterhouse in the same term as Butler, all but 3 served in the War; 7 died.

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In the event he did go up, in the Trinity Term 1917 out of step with the academic year, so as to seek an army commission as painlessly as possible *via* the University O.T.C.: hence his co-residence with Butler and Dodds whom he would not have met otherwise. That September he was commissioned into the Somerset Light Infantry as a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant and 2 months later he was sent out to join the regiment's 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion in France. In April 1918 he was wounded and invalided home. Before he was fully fit again the Armistice was declared and on Christmas Eve 1918, a few weeks after his 20<sup>th</sup> birthday, he was demobilised. He then promptly resumed his university course<sup>96</sup>. His experience in the trenches clearly made an indelible impression. He later wrote: 'All that we fear from all the kinds of adversity severally is collected together in the life of a soldier on active service<sup>97</sup>.'

Lewis gives us a few more glimpses of Butler at University College in 1917. 'I like him better the more I know him ... He is not however an immaculate character. I had often heard that he was very amusing when drunk but I had no experience until last night.' He had burst into Lewis' room about 10.00PM declaiming poetry, then rolled on the floor 'expressing an ardent desire to go and kiss the Dean'. With some fellow-undergraduates Lewis tried to get him into bed but he begged to be let lie. Finally about 11.00PM they managed to remove him; by now he wanted to 'be in the pine forest in the arms of Aphrodite'; even in his cups he maintained his poetic good taste. Lewis went for a bathe with him the following morning, by which time he seemed 'almost quite recovered'.

He is several times mentioned in Lewis' letters over the remainder of that term. They had some intense discussions on Irish and other topics<sup>98</sup> and they occasionally breakfasted together. In early June, Butler and Dodds gave a dinner in a friend's rooms at another College to celebrate their first class degrees, at which Lewis confesses to his correspondent that for the first time in his life he got 'royally drunk'.

He adds that he was not the only guest in that condition; they made such an uproar that the College Dean sent around to require that they leave at once. [He was so drunk that, untypically, he mistakes the College at which the event was held, Brasenose, for Exeter College.] He continues this letter: 'Butler [and nearly everyone else] has now gone down so that this weekend I have lived very quietly.'

At the very end of term, in another letter, Lewis writes: 'Partly from interest in Yeats and Celtic mythology, partial from a natural repulsion to noisy, drum-beating, bullying Orangemen and partly from an association with Butler, I begin to get a very warm feeling for Ireland in general. I mean the real Ireland of Patsy Macan [*ie.* the Master] etc., not so

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<sup>95</sup> See also p. 10.

<sup>96</sup> Lewis went on to take a First Class degree in Classics in 1922 then a further First in English Language and Literature in 1923.

<sup>97</sup> Remarkably, but he was a remarkable man, Lewis was arguing *against* pacifism.

<sup>98</sup> To set against his more admirable characteristics, Lewis had sado-masochistic tastes concerning which, in his earlier years at least, he could be quite open with close friends. In June 1917 he wrote to one of these: 'I hope you are right as to the possibilities of my finding my particular kind of love. Butler tells me that the person to read on my subject is a Frenchman of the 17<sup>th</sup> century called the Visconte de Sade: his books, however, are very hard to come by.'

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much our protestant North. Indeed if I ever get interested in politics I shall probably be a Nationalist.’

To his credit, Lewis appears to have required no persuasion as to the nastiness of some aspects of Ulster, but there must have been something special about Butler that he could help bring around an opinionated Ulsterman in this way. Some of the matching nastinesses of Irish Nationalism had yet fully to emerge. For those with eyes to see, there would soon be no need to go so far as the Balkans to find fascist violence and ethnic cleansing, on either side, in full swing.

### A Legal Career

After graduating, Theobald Fitzwalter Butler, as he is usually referred to in print, continued his legal studies. In *The Times* newspaper of 13<sup>th</sup> January 1921 he is announced as having passed his Bar finals in the Hilary Term 1920, top of his Class with a Certificate of Honour, and a Studentship worth 100 guineas/year [£2,700 at 2004 values, using the Retail Price Index as comparator] tenable for 3 years. That same year he was called to the Bar by Inner Temple<sup>99</sup>. A young barrister’s income was typically meagre then, until he began to make a name for himself. To keep the wolf from the door Butler turned to reporting criminal cases for legal publications. He continued at this throughout his career, so that his eventual total output was ‘prodigious’.

He later built up a substantial practice on the Midland Circuit; as an advocate he is said to have been ‘a scrupulously fair but formidable opponent’. He went on to become Recorder of Newark 1945-62, then of Derby 1962-63. As a judge he was ‘in his element, always firmly in control and impartial, without ever abusing his position’ although ‘he was inclined to be unexpectedly severe when sentencing male sexual offenders’<sup>100</sup>.

In 1960 he became Master of the Bench. In 1962 he was appointed Diocesan Chancellor of Peterborough [i.e. as Judge in the consistory court of the diocese, hearing ecclesiastical cases, chiefly to do with permissions for works of all kinds to church buildings].

His relatively low rank in the judicial hierarchy certainly belied his talents. Capitalising on his extensive experience in law reporting and the encyclopædic knowledge this brought, he was also for many years editor-in-chief of that *sine qua non* of criminal practice, *Archbold’s Criminal Proceedings*. He was Chairman of the South Eastern Area Greater London Quarter Sessions 1965-67 and after his retirement a member of the Law Commission.

As a man and as a colleague he is said to have had ‘wit and weight and wisdom, but no pomposity or pride’. He had ‘a photographic memory, and an amazing knowledge of English literature, and of painting, sculpture and architecture.’

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<sup>99</sup> Inner Temple [strictly, the Honourable Society of the Inner Temple] founded in the 14<sup>th</sup> century is one of the four English Inns of Court; the others are Gray’s Inn, Lincoln’s Inn and Middle Temple. Anyone wishing to train as a barrister must join one of the Inns and it is the Inns alone which can eventually call a student to the Bar on successful completion of his, or today her, pupillage.

<sup>100</sup> Perhaps a reflection of his experiences at Charterhouse: a story for another day.

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## Marriage

Butler remained a bachelor until his 50's. In 1948 'at a rather more advanced age than most' he married in Nottingham Laura Rachel, daughter of the late Sir Vincent Nash, Deputy Lieutenant, and of Lady Nash, of Shannon View House, Kilmurry, County Limerick, Eire. There were no children.

## Coda

Like his one-time friend Eric Dodds, Theobald Butler lived his entire adult life in England, but perhaps with the passion of an exile he developed a profound interest in his Irish roots; he was a kinsman of Lord Dunboyne. He became a leading member of his family society, the Butler Society at whose rallies he gave erudite lectures. His obituary by Lord Dunboyne, published in the Society's Journal, concludes with some lines of his own:

'I am content if when [my rest-time won]  
I meet my mighty forbears face to face  
I can recount to them of duty done,  
Of the untarnished honour of our race,  
Of fortune, lands, yes all save honour, lost,  
Of loyalty that counted not the cost.'

No great poet perhaps, but not lacking in family pride, nor in sincerity.

His funeral was held at Peterborough Cathedral on 12<sup>th</sup> March 1976, and a memorial service at the Temple Church on 4<sup>th</sup> May 1976.

## Acknowledgements

I am firstly most grateful to Charterhouse School for access to the School archives, particularly to bound copies of the School magazines, *The Carthusian* and *The Greyfriar*, for the War years, in which Butler's and other 'Letters from the Front' originally appeared, also for access to various other publications and internal documents outlining their authors' earlier progress through the School, their wartime service and, for those who survived, their later careers.

I can perhaps take credit for rediscovering the letters themselves whilst looking up wartime obituaries for a different project, but my thanks are certainly due to Ann Wheeler the School's Archivist, lacking whose guidance I should otherwise have been entirely at sea. Chris Wheeler drew kind attention to some linguistic errors but also and most valuably lent me his copy of *The Ship that Changed the World*, lacking which my understanding of Rear-Admiral Troubridge's crucial twin rôles, in the initial *mise-en-scène*<sup>101</sup>, then in Serbia itself, would have been far poorer.

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<sup>101</sup> Aboard one of Troubridge's cruisers, *H.M.S. Defence*, during his abortive pursuit of the *Goeben* and the *Breslau* was another Old Carthusian, Surgeon George Moore Johnson [16/02/1880 - 31/05/1916] who later died when *Defence* was blown up and sunk with all hands at the Battle of Jutland, but that too is a story for another day.



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Also deserving grateful mention are the Butler Society of Ireland and Robin Darwall-Smith, Archivist at University College Oxford, for copies of Butler's obituaries published in the *Society's Journal* and the *University College Record* respectively. I am very much indebted to R D-S for alerting me to the accounts of University College life, and more, during the War years, to be found in E.R. Dodds' autobiography and in C.S. Lewis' letters. Dodds' account of his and Butler's doings in Serbia and Lewis' of Butler in his final University term which I then found in these volumes were of immense help. Together they were in fact responsible for my expanding what began as a would-be modest attempt to set Butler's Serbian adventures in context into the rather fuller account above.

My thanks too are due to the University College London and to their library staff at the School of Slavonic and East European Studies for so hospitably granting me access to their very rare and precious copies of Lady Paget's two privately published Reports.

It is almost invidious to single out any other particular authors or titles in my Booklist, but of the more modern works, C. Fryer's two volumes under the Columbia University Press imprint have been greatly illuminating. Admiral Troubridge's *Serbian Journal*, published verbatim in the second of these, sheds a flood of further light.

My son Christopher Webb, currently a Cambridge undergraduate, very nobly took time out from his own busy studies to run JSTOR searches for relevant papers, also to proof-read my text thus preserving his aged parent from much embarrassment; needless to add, any surviving glitches are entirely my own fault. As a classicist Christopher was much taken by the parallels drawn by John Buchan in his *Nelson's History* [a popular, not to say populist, work too at a shilling or so a volume, not a specialist account] between events in the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern Theatres 1914 - 1918 and those of classical times more than two millennia earlier in that same region, as described by Herodotus, Thucydides *et al.* But then, Buchan was himself a notable classicist.

A Mention in Despatches is unquestionably due to AbeBooks [[www.abebooks.co.uk](http://www.abebooks.co.uk)]: that cornucopia of pre-owned *esoterica* and essential aid to historical research for those lacking ready access to a major library.

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