

**Modern History Sourcebook:
Sir Edwin Pears:
The Massacre of Bulgarians, 1876**

From: <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1876massacre-bulgaria.html>

Mr. Disraeli was then Prime Minister, and treated the matter very lightly. He declared, in reply to a statement that persons had been tortured as well as killed, that he doubted whether torture was practiced among a people "who generally terminated their connection with culprits in a more expeditious manner." He spoke of the Circassians who had taken a large share in the plunder and killing of the Bulgarians as "settlers with a great stake in the country." His light manner of speaking on the subject irritated Members on both sides of the House, who recognised that if my statements were true they constituted a damning charge against Turkish methods of government in Bulgaria, and demanded at least serious examination. My old friend, Professor Hunter, in the House of Commons said that he knew me as a "slow-minded man, who would not make statements of that kind without being satisfied of the truth."

Mr. (afterwards Sir John) Robinson, of the Daily News, sent me a telegram reporting what Mr. Disraeli had said and adding that he desired full explanations. Thereupon I saw various friends, and especially Dr. Long and Dr. Washburn, who furnished me with translations of a mass of correspondence, from which I wrote a second and longer letter to the Daily News. In my first letter I gave the names of thirty-seven villages which had been destroyed and whose inhabitants had been tortured or killed. In the second letter, written on June 30th, I brought the number of destroyed villages up to sixty, and stated that I had seen an official report which estimated the number of persons killed at 12,000.

It should be understood that at this time there was no revolt in Bulgaria, though there had been considerable expression of discontent. The idea of the Turks was to crush out the spirit of the Bulgarian people, and thus prevent revolt. In the two letters mentioned I had given the names of the sixty villages which had been destroyed. One London journal, which got into trouble with Mr. Labouchere of Truth, boldly asserted that the names of these villages did not figure in any known map. The statement may have been true of English maps, because the declaration of Mr. Schuyler, the United States Consul-General was not without a basis of truth, that for the United States and the British Empire I was the discoverer of the existence of Bulgaria. I replied to the statement that the villages were as easily identified as if I had given the names of Yorkshire or Devonshire villages, and I urged that a Commission should be sent out by H.M. Government to make a report on the matter. The publication of the second letter still further aroused the British people. These letters, in the words of Mr. Gladstone, "first sounded the alarm in Europe."

Meanwhile at my request, Mr. Robinson sent Mr. MacGahan, an Irish-American of great experience and fine character, to Bulgaria to report more fully than I had been able to do. There was no question of my going, and that for two reasons. First, that I was then fully

occupied with professional work, and secondly, that beyond doubt difficulties would have been placed in my way by the Turkish Government; probably they would even have refused to give me the necessary local passport. The selection of Mr. MacGahan was a happy one. He was a friend of Mr. Schuyler's. Both of them had been in Central Asia and knew something of Russia, and neither of them could be charged with having any prejudice against the Turks. Mr. Schuyler went on behalf of his Government to make a report, and Mr. MacGahan accompanied him.

One of the first places they visited was Batak, the destruction of which had been mentioned in my first letter. From thence MacGahan sent me by private messenger a telegram, which came as a thunderbolt to the British public. Its contents were so horrible that I recognized at once Constantinople. I therefore sent it by letter to be dispatched from Bucarest. It was followed a day or two afterwards by a letter which I sent likewise by Bucarest. This letter, which was dated 2nd August, and appeared in the Daily News about a week later, created a profound sensation, not only in Great Britain but throughout Europe. It was at once a series of pictures describing with photographic accuracy what the observers had seen and a mass of the most ghastly stories they had heard on trustworthy authority. They had seen dogs feeding on human remains, heaps of human skulls, skeletons nearly entire, rotting clothing, human hair, and flesh putrid and lying in one foul heap. They saw the town with not a roof left, with women here and there wailing their dead amid the ruins. They examined the heap and found that the skulls and skeletons were all small and that the clothing was that of women and girls. MacGahan counted a hundred skulls immediately around him. The skeletons were headless, showing that these victims had been beheaded. Further on they saw the skeletons of two little children lying side by side with frightful sabre cuts on their little skulls. MacGahan remarked that the number of children killed in these massacres was something enormous. They heard on trustworthy authority from eye-witnesses that they were often spiked on bayonets. There was not a house beneath the ruins of which he and Mr. Schuyler did not see human remains, and the streets were strewn with them. When they drew nigh the church they found the ground covered with skeletons and lots of putrid flesh. In the church itself the sight was so appalling that I do not care to reproduce the terrible description given by Mr. MacGahan.

Batak, where these horrors occurred, is situated about thirty miles from Tartar Bazarjik, which is on the railway and on a spur of the Rhodope Mountains. It was a thriving town, rich and prosperous in comparison with neighboring Moslem villages. Its population previous to the massacres was about 9,000. MacGahan remarks that its prosperity had excited the envy and jealousy of its Moslem neighbours. I elsewhere remark that, in all the Moslem atrocities, Chiot, Bulgarian, and Armenian, the principal incentive has been the larger prosperity of the Christian population; for, in spite of centuries of oppression and plunder, Christian industry and Christian morality everywhere make for national wealth and intelligence. . . .

Source:

From: Sir Edwin Pears, *Forty Years in Constantinople*, 1873-1915, (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1916), pp. 16-19, reprinted in Alfred J. Bannan and Achilles Edelenyi, eds., *Documentary History of Eastern Europe*, (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1970), pp. 191-194.

Scanned by Jerome S. Arkenberg, Cal. State Fullerton. The text has been modernized by Prof. Arkenberg.

This text is part of the [Internet Modern History Sourcebook](#). The Sourcebook is a collection of public domain and copy-permitted texts for introductory level classes in modern European and World history.

Unless otherwise indicated the specific electronic form of the document is copyright. Permission is granted for electronic copying, distribution in print form for educational purposes and personal use. If you do reduplicate the document, indicate the source. No permission is granted for commercial use of the Sourcebook.

© Paul Halsall, August 1998
halsall@murray.fordham.edu