The Bulgarian Horrors Through the Eyes of an American Journalist: J. A. MacGahan's Role in the Liberation of Bulgaria from the Ottoman Empire 1876-1878

Miglena Sandmeier

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The Bulgarian Horrors through the Eyes of an American Journalist: 
Januarius Aloysius MacGahan’s Role in the Liberation of Bulgaria 
from the Ottoman Empire 1876 - 1878

by

MIGLENA SANDMEIER

Under the Direction of Leonard Teel

ABSTRACT

The thesis examines the role of an American journalist of Irish descent, Januarius MacGahan, who became known as the “Liberator of Bulgaria.” Evidence presented in the thesis substantially restores MacGahan’s role in the liberation of Bulgaria from the Ottoman Empire. That accolade was deleted from Bulgarian history by Marxist revisionist historians during the Communist regimes in the 20th Century.

This paper affirms that it was MacGahan’s resolve and passionate outcry against injustice and cruelty he witnessed, that changed the course of European diplomacy and ultimately led to a war that liberated Bulgaria.

INDEX WORDS: Bulgaria, Russo-Turkish War, Russia, Ottoman Empire, British Empire, New York Herald, Journalism, reporter, liberation, reporting, war correspondent, newspapers, war, Khiva, Napoleon
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MIGLENA SANDMEIER

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
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Georgia State University

December 2013
DEDICATION

A special dedication to my late grandmother Nedelya, whose dedication to family, heritage and education, gave her strength to support all her children, in the face of hunger, poverty and cruelty. She faced all the challenges of the Second World War and Communism with dignity and never once complained that life has been difficult. She was an autodidact, but her encyclopedic knowledge of world history was inspirational.
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I would like to give a very special thanks to my family and friends who have offered their continuous support throughout this process. In particular, my mother Dora Ivanova, who provided invaluable editorial comments from her extensive knowledge of Bulgarian history; my dad Ivan Ivanov, who has been a source of encouragement and inspiration for many years; and Valchan Valchanov who has helped me maintain a positive perspective on this project and life. Last, but not least, I feel it is necessary to thank my ex-husband Lucas Sandmeier for his support and friendship, my children, Michael and Samuel, who have been the most understanding and supportive young men, and who make me proud each day. I need to thank my grandparents, Nedelya, Kolyo, Dana and Marin, who are sadly not with us any more, but have been a source of inspiration. They told me stories passed along for generations that I will never forget and will be sure to pass them on to my children and theirs. My family and friends’ unconditional love and support has been responsible for everything I have done as a scholar and as a person.
TABLE OF CONTENTS:

1. J. A. MacGahan, The Liberator from New Lexington OH........................................1

2. The Fourth Estate and the House of Commons..................................................2

3. The Ottoman Empire and the “Eastern Question”.............................................5

4. MacGahan and the Technological Improvements in the Press..............................6

5. The Road to Batak ..............................................................................................8

6. “I Am No Longer Impartial”..............................................................................10

7. The World in Motion..........................................................................................15

8. William Gladstone and the Eastern Question ....................................................17

9. Eugene Schuyler’s Preliminary Report to Minister Maynard..............................18

10. Lord Beaconsfield, The Ottoman Empire and the Six Powers Conference.........20

11. On the Eve of the Russo-Turkish War 1877.....................................................21

12. Death in Constantinople.....................................................................................23
Chapter 1. J. A. MacGahan, “The Liberator” from New Lexington OH

On a hot 4th of July morning in 1911, the homecoming celebration in the small town of New Lexington, Ohio ended in the town cemetery for a commemorative ceremony honoring one of their most famous citizens, the journalist and war correspondent Januarius Aloysius MacGahan. The tombstone erected upon his grave read: Januarius Aloysius MacGahan, 6/12/1844 - 6/9/1878, Liberator of Bulgaria. ¹

What did an American journalist of Irish descent have to do with the small Balkan nation’s historical liberation? This paper examines this question, and traces evidence from primary sources that shows the timeline of events leading up to the Russo-Turkish war, and MacGahan’s first dispatches about the atrocities. His resolve and passionate outcry against injustice and cruelty of the Ottoman army toward the Bulgarian population, changed the discourse in the British Parliament and it consequently altered the course of European diplomacy.

To call him “the Liberator of Bulgaria,” may be an exaggeration, but he undeniably stirred up emotions in the readers of London Daily News, and British Parliamentarians, and through the press, directed the world’s attention to the small enslaved nation. After the Russo-Turkish war ended with the signing of the Treaty of San Stefano on March 3, 1878, Bulgaria was established as an independent state with its pre-Ottoman borders and territory. Significantly, by the 20th Century, Communist Bulgaria’s Marxist historians found it necessary to “forget” MacGahan entirely, suppressing all Western contributions to Bulgarian liberation.²


² Yannis Sygkelos, Nationalism from the Left: The Bulgarian Communist Party During the Second World War and the Early Post-War Years Brill: Balkan Academic Studies Library, 2011, 201.
This paper examines the relationship between MacGahan’s dispatches from Bulgaria and the consequent conversations in the British press and in the Parliament, that led up to British politicians speaking up against the Turks, and urging the Queen to not engage to help the Ottoman Empire, should Russia attack it. It also traces the connection between J.A. MacGahan’s dispatches and the events that unfolded in the British Parliament, in Russia, and Bulgaria and makes evident his invaluable role. MacGahan becomes more than just another war correspondent in this “story.” He becomes personally engaged to change the plight of the people he writes about. This determination is contagious and affects the readers of the *London Daily News* in Britain, as well as the readers of the reprints of his dispatches all around the world. Three factors play a role in the liberation of Bulgaria from the Ottoman Empire:

The technological advancements of the press and especially the telegraph and the sub-Atlantic cable, which allowed for information to be dispersed quicker and to more people than ever before.

The barbaric acts of violence done by the mercenaries called bashi bazouk, in Batak and other regions of Bulgaria, described in every gruesome detail, made it impossible for the world to sit and be impartial.

MacGahan’s wife, Barbara, translated most of his dispatches in Russian and sent to the Russian newspaper *Golos*. The indignation with what was happening to their fellow Orthodox Christian brothers, was growing exponentially in Russia.

MacGahan’s role in this process is vital, as he exposed these atrocities and swayed the public opinion to support a military action which liberated Bulgaria.
Chapter 2. The Fourth Estate and the House of Commons

The role of the media as an important factor in political decision-making process was well established by 1876. Already in 1850, the surgeon and journalist Frederick Knight Hunt proclaimed: “The newspaper press wields the power of a Fourth Estate.”

The new presses, able to produce newspapers faster and with less costs, were no longer a novelty, but becoming ubiquitous in cities and towns across the Western world. The unprecedented flow of information and opinions on the pages of the newspapers possessed a power of such magnitude that it was impossible to be ignored.

On June 23rd, word of the carnage reached Edwyn Pears, who the London Daily News resident correspondent in Constantinople. He wrote:

Dark rumours have been whispered about Constantinople during the last month of horrible atrocities committed in Bulgaria. The local newspapers have given mysterious hints about correspondence from the interior which they have been obliged to suppress. It is too soon yet to attempt to ascertain the number who have been killed. An intelligent Turk who has just arrived estimates it at 18,000. Bulgarians speak of 30,000 and the destruction of upwards of a hundred villages. I pass over stories of the burning of forty or fifty Bulgarian girls in a stable and the massacre of upwards of a hundred children in the village school house. They are repeated everywhere in Constantinople, I have no sufficient authority to enable to express an opinion on their truth.

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4 London Daily News, June 23, 1876, p. 4
The London Daily News June 23rd report was based on a number of sources, most of them from within Bulgaria, through connections in Constantinople. The London Daily News took the lead, initially through its correspondents in Constantinople and later by sending to Bulgaria, the American freelance journalist, Januarius MacGahan. The subsequent press reports soon directly influenced discussions in the British Parliament about the alleged atrocities committed in the Ottoman Empire. On June 27th, 1876, four days after the London Daily News mentioned the atrocities in Bulgaria, the Earl of Derby quoted the newspaper in a speech in the House of Commons:

The Earl of Derby said that he saw the other day the correspondence of the London Daily News, a very startling series of statements as to the alleged massacre and other acts of violence stated to have been committed by the Bashibozouks and the Turkish Troops. 

If MacGahan hadn’t traveled to Batak and the London Daily News, hadn’t published the account of the atrocities, the British public, and the British parliament wouldn’t have been aware of what was going on in the Bulgarian territories of the Ottoman Empire. Thus, the press’ role was fundamental in stimulating Parliament to investigate what was allegedly a horrible massacre.

The issue became increasingly important in discussions in Parliament, especially after the London Daily News published MacGahan’s reports from the ground. As his stories were getting more and more horrid, the public indignation rose steadily. The dispatches were being reprinted by newspapers across Britain and the western world, and the news was spreading across the globe thanks to the telegraph and Atlantic cable. Clearly, it was MacGahan’s dispatches and gut-wrenching descriptions of the horrid monstrosities that he witnessed that

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5 London Daily News, June 27, 1876. p. 5
placed his reports front and center in the Parliament’s debates and in a pamphlet published by the former leader of the Liberal Party, William E. Gladstone. Days before the publishing the pamphlet, Gladstone acknowledged the impact of all the news stories in a Parliament speech: “In the matter of the Bulgarian outrages, you have led the people of England: and I am about to walk as best I can in your steps, by an immediate publication, in which I shall hope to pay the London Daily News a just acknowledgment.” 6 In the landmark pamphlet that he authored “The Bulgarian Horrors and the Question of the East” he mentioned the importance of the Daily News reporting: “The first alarm respecting the Bulgarian outrages was sounded by the Daily News,” he wrote, stressing that the role of the paper through its foreign correspondence “has been the most weighty, I may say, the most splendid.” 7

Although some newspapers in Britain and the United States showed were not as involved as the Daily News with the reported suffering in Bulgaria, it was increasingly harder to stay impartial about the carnage in Batak and other Bulgarian towns. The official documentation of the events by a U.S. official in the face of Eugene Schuyler and later by Secretary Walter Baring, at the British Embassy in Constantinople. 8

Walter Baring, who was a secretary of the British Embassy to the Ottoman Empire, and the American Consul General in Constantinople and a Secretary at the American Embassy, Eugene Schuyler, joined by The London Daily News’ war correspondent Januarius MacGahan on

7 Gladstone, William E. The Bulgarian Horrors and the Question of the East, J. Murray 1876, 15
8 David Harris, Britain and the Bulgarian Horrors of 1876, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939), 150.
his fact finding mission to Bulgaria. Baring, Schuyler and MacGahan became the most authoritative English-speaking observers of the aftermath in Bulgaria.\textsuperscript{9}

\textsuperscript{9} MacGahan, p. 11
Chapter 3. The Ottoman Empire and the “Eastern Question”

The “Bulgarian Horrors” played a big role in the decline of the Ottoman Empire and its governance of the Balkans in the 19th Century. “It is of no use to try to maintain the Turkish Empire,” Napoleon Bonaparte had predicted. “We shall witness its fall in our time.” 10 Politicians and diplomats throughout Europe worried what one country or another would gain from its decline. In the Russo-Turkish war of 1768-74, for instance, Russia won the right to freely navigate in and out of the Black Sea through the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles Straits. But the next Russo Turkish War - the Crimean War of 1855-56 - brought forward a multidimensional issue spanning from the Balkans into Russia and Asia. Distrust in Russia had become the main factor in determining British foreign policy into the 1870s, so dominating, that Britain would have been more prone to enter in an alliance with its century-old enemy France than to negotiate with Russia. 11 This was the snap-shot of the times, when the British Ambassador to Constantinople, Sir Henry Elliot, reported that Muslims had begun attacking Bulgarian Christians in 1875. 12

The problems with the Christian population on the Balkan Peninsula, as well as the financial weakening of the Ottoman Empire, became known as the “Eastern Question.” British governments supported the Ottomans, both to protect British interests in the region and to prevent Russia from increasing its influence and control. By 1876, realpolitik led the British to


support the Ottomans without serious objections to their harsh mode of governance. But the events that unfolded in the spring of 1876 changed the perception that the British population held of the Turks, and brought on a Europe-wide indignation against the atrocities.

In May of 1876, the disturbing reports of carnage came out of Bulgaria. The actual massacre of Batak had taken place on May 9th, 1876. On May 26, 1876, Sir Henry G. Elliott, Consul General of Great Britain in Constantinople, wrote to Sir William White, who was Ambassador in Belgrade:

> There is no excuse for the measures adopted by the Turks in arming Bashi Bazouks, Circassians and gipsies, whose outrages are driving peaceful villagers to desperation and revolt. I am doing what I can to have this put a stop to.

Elliott was accused falsely by Gladstone of suppressing the truth about the “horrors.” In his autobiography edited by his daughter, Gertrude Elliott, after his death, Sir Henry Elliott reminisces in regard to the events of May 1876 with a clear conscience:

> I am not, of course, an impartial judge with regard to my own actions, but, looking calmly at them after a lapse of seventeen years, I am still at a loss to see what I omitted to do that was possible for a person in my position; and I have at least the satisfaction of knowing that I did very much more than was done by all my colleagues combined, though they were precisely similarly placed. Before any outrages occurred I urged the Porte to take measures to prevent them; when they occurred I insisted that they must be stopped; and I was incessant in pressing for the punishment of the guilty. It would be difficult for those who most virulently attacked me to say what more I could have done.

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15 Elliott, Sir Henry G. Some Revolutions and Other Diplomatic Experiences Edited by his daughter, (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., 1922) 272-273
Chapter 4. MacGahan and the Technological Improvements in the Press

As Januarius MacGahan’s reports were published in the British press, people naturally wondered about this American whose revelations so disturbed them. By then, MacGahan was already one of the world’s most prolific war correspondents. In only six years since his debut at the New York Herald, Jr., MacGahan had managed to surpass many seasoned reporters. In 1871, during the Franco-Prussian War, he had scored scoops by embedding with the French Army and then using the new communications technologies - the telegraph and the Atlantic cable - to publish his stories in New York before they were printed in England. 16 MacGahan went on to cover the Third Carlist War in Spain, The French Commune, the taking of Khiva in Southwest Asia by the Russians, and the Crimean War. The Khiva adventure led to his first book “Campaigning on the Oxus and the Fall of Khiva.”

James Gordon Bennett Jr. the flamboyant owner of the New York Herald, was quite pleased with MacGahan. The young journalist’s bravado, style, and speed matched Bennett’s appetite for the sensational and timely reporting that his father had pioneered as a Herald staple. At that time, it wasn’t common for reporters to be mentioned by name and praised for their work. So, it comes as a big token of appreciation for MacGahan, to see his name in Gordon Bennett’s editorial pages as “one of our special correspondents.”

Stories in the Herald of the suffering of Bourbaki’s soldiers in their freezing bivouac, huddled around sputtering campfires smoldering of green wood - these have been MacGahan’s work. 17

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16 Henry Howe, Historical Collections of Ohio. H. Howe & Son, Columbus 1889, p. 394

17 Walker, Dale. 30
Earlier in 1876 Bennett sponsored a sensational mission to the Arctic Sea aboard the barge *Pandora*, and he sent MacGahan to write about the journey. Bennett hoped they would discover a Northwest passage through the Arctic which had been sought since the time of John Cabot. Bennett hoped they would also find traces of the lost Sir John Franklin Expedition, which disappeared on its Arctic voyage in 1845. Unfortunately, dangerous conditions in the Arctic Sea forced the *Pandora* to abandon this effort and return.

Upon his return from the Northern Sea MacGahan moved his family to Paris and pleaded with Bennett to allow him to settle down there and write a book about the failed expedition. Bennett didn’t want to part with his most prolific and engaging reporter. He accused MacGahan of ingratitude for all Bennet and *The Herald* had done to bring MacGahan the fame that he was enjoying. Bennett wanted him to attempt another trip to the Arctic. MacGahan refused. Bennett finally agreed to a three month leave. MacGahan finshed the book, *Under the Northern Lights*. Barbara MacGahan, Januarius’ Russian-born wife, described this time in her diaries: “I felt he had achieved enough to do without the slavery to Mr. Bennett.18

In the early spring of 1876 the new book got a lukewarm welcome. One critic noted:

MacGahan writes in a graphic lively style, and carries his reader along with him. The only difficulty seems to have been that, having nothing to write about, he felt himself under the necessity of padding out a volume of old second-hand matter. 19

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In the eve of his 1876 assignment in Bulgaria by the *London Daily News*, MacGahan was already recognized as a modern journalist. He was “equipped with modern tools of the trade, notably, a penchant for speed. One scholar of that journalistic era, credits MacGahan as quite exceptional:

MacGahan preferred speed to felicity of expression. […] Customarily this meant, riding horseback to the nearest telegraph office, which was often a considerable distance, and in the case of the Turkish war, being able to surreptitiously bypass the intrusive and sometimes brutal Russian censorship. The resourceful MacGahan beat repeatedly Forbes during the Turkish war, which they jointly covered for the London Daily News and the Herald. MacGahan devised clever shortcuts, such as hiring “gallopers” to carry segments of a story to the nearest telegraph every 20 minutes or so, while he was still in the process of composing it. In the opinion of Stephen Bonsal, an outstanding American special, “MacGahan has lightning flashes at his command!”

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Chapter 5. The Road to Batak

In the summer of 1876 MacGahan received a letter from Eugene Schuyler, whom he met during the Crimean War. A US diplomat, stationed in Constantinople, Schuyler invited him to join in investigating the rumors coming from Bulgaria, about atrocities committed by the Turkish army.

MacGahan immediately asked Gordon Bennett to send him to the Balkans. But Bennett, still had his mind set on yet another Arctic voyage. In the London office of the *New York Herald*, the two men were heard quarreling. MacGahan walked out on the paper and its editor. Almost immediately, the *London Daily News*, four doors down the street, hired him to go to Bulgaria.

The three men, MacGahan, Schuyler and Baring, travelled together to Philippopolis and arrived on July 23, 1876. From there they made their way to the south west corner of Bulgaria, high up in the Rhodopi mountains. Hundreds of Ottoman mercenaries called “bashi bouzouk” had entered the village of Batak and promised to grant mercy if the villagers surrendered. Villagers from Batak, who had escaped the massacre, walked alongside MacGahan and his companions, who were on horsebacks. The villagers told them that despite the fact that they surrendered, their relatives and friends still suffered torture and mutilation. MacGahan memorialized the carnage of Batak with the term “Bulgarian Horrors.” As they were approaching Batak, they witnessed the atrocities first hand. Four weeks later, the first *Daily News* report mentions secrecy and covering up of what had happened, although Sir Elliott and Sir White had been clearly in the know. Traveling on horseback, MacGahan found 60 to 70 villages burned to

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21 Known today as Plovdiv.
the ground and reported that 12,000 to 15,000 Bulgarian Christians had been slaughtered in four days.

MacGahan wrote: “For my own part, once the enormous number of 15,000 killed in four days is admitted, I do not care to inquire any further. you cannot increase or diminish the horror of the thing by mere statements of round numbers.”

The London reactions to MacGahan’s dispatches propelled a grassroots movement of indignation and protest against the lack of action by the British government. The pathos in MacGahan’s writing, his vivid descriptions, mixed with his personal feelings and of overpowering sadness and fury, mobilized the public and politicians.

With the British public so deeply moved, Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli could no longer downplay the events in Bulgaria as a simple act of dealing with unruly local insurgents.

“The great crime in the eyes of Mr. Disraeli and Sir Henry Elliot,” MacGahan stated, was “to have said there 30,000 killed when there were only 25,000.”

Gladstone’s famous pamphlet, and later, his “Lessons in Massacre,” clearly demonstrate the influence MacGahan’s dispatches had on him. Gladstone wrote:

> The heaviest question of all is not what was suffered, in a given district at a given date, but what is the normal and habitual condition of eight or ten millions of the subjected races, who for fifteen generations of men have been in servitude to the Turk.

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22 MacGahan 18

23 MacGahan, 158

Chapter 6. “I Am No Longer Impartial”

On August 2nd 1876, MacGahan submitted the report that triggered much of the British public’s reaction. While the numbers were important, so was the magnitude of cruelty. MacGahan reported in detail every monstrosity that he witnessed firsthand. He had looked at horror, and did not wish to spare his readers

I fear I am no longer impartial, and I am certainly no longer cool. There are certain things that cannot be investigated in a judicial state of mind...
There are things too horrible to allow anything like calm inquiry; things the vileness of which the eye refuses to look upon, and which the mind refuses to contemplate... I have already investigated enough to feel convinced that from a purely statistical point of view, further investigation is necessary. ...... When, in addition, you have the horrid details of the vilest outrages committed upon women; the hacking to pieces of helpless children and spitting them upon bayonets; and when you have these details repeated to you by the hundred, not by Bulgarians, but by different consuls at Philippopolis, and German officials on the railway, as well as Greeks, Armenians, priests, missionaries, and even Turks themselves, you begin to feel that further investigation is superfluous.25

MacGahan attempted to confirm the numbers – inhabitants, houses, victims, Turkish army – and he documented his efforts in his dispatches.

Batak was a place of 900 houses, and about 8,000 to 9,000 inhabitants.
As there are no trustworthy statistics of any other kind in Turkey, it was impossible to tell exactly what number the population of any place is, or was. Edep Ephendi in his report states that there were only about 1,400 inhabitants in the village, all told..

A more impudent falsehood was never uttered, even by a Turk. 26

Schuyler, was equally outraged at what he witnessed in Batak. “I am burning with indignation and rage - can scarcely contain myself,” he wrote. “Lowest estimate of Christians killed 12,000… Highest estimate of Turks killed two hundred and thirty. 27

MacGahan pointed fingers at the guilty. He singled out a few Ottoman leaders whom he described having “no pity, no compassion, no bowels. They have not even the generosity, the pity of wild beasts. Even a tiger will not slay the young of his own species.” 28 Among the culprits he detailed Ahmet Aga’s role as the captain of a company of mercenary bashi bozouks, who burned Batak.

Ahmet Aga, a captain of a company of bashi bazouks, who likewise distinguished himself with his ferocity. This Ahmet Aga, is a low ignorant brute who can neither read nor write, and yet who has been promoted to the rank of Pasha, and with that exquisite mockery of European demand for justice, for which the Oriental mind is so distinguished, who has been named a member of the commission appointed to prosecute and punish the bashi-bazouks. 29

As the two Americans ventured towards Batak, they stopped in Peshtera. They were received by a family of five and fed, despite the scarcity of food they observed everywhere they went. They had some difficulties with Turkish authorities who insisted on sending an officer to accompany them on the way to Batak. Both men refused the offer politely but firmly. As the

26 MacGahan, 24-25.
27 Eugene Schuyler, Selected Essays (New York, 1901), 73-74.
28 MacGahan, 45.
29 MacGahan, 13.
Turkish authorities felt this was a lèse majesté\textsuperscript{30} not to be condoned, they forbad all Pestera inhabitants from helping the Americans in any way.

Despite the explicit order, villagers provided them with horses and food. They were also joined by dozens of Batak survivors who had escaped the bloodbath and moved to Peshtera. During the three hour uphill horse ride, the people walking beside them told MacGahan and Schuyler other horrific stories. MacGahan spoke fluent Russian and later told his wife “I could have fancied myself amongst peasants of the Volga.”\textsuperscript{31}

Despite such documentation, no one had been held responsible for the atrocities, a fact that fueled the rage at the many grassroots protests in Britain. One critic noted: “It is clear that it matters little if 3,000 or 10,000 were killed, if almost every ruffian guilty of the blood of children or women could evade all responsibility and penalty.” \textsuperscript{32}

MacGahan assigned guilt in his letters from Batak and the region: “[all of] these massacres were committed by the order of the authorities, and that is why the men who committed them have been rewarded with decorations and promotions.” \textsuperscript{33}

Despite MacGahan’s allegations, the Ottoman Government and Disraeli, speaking for the Queen, refused to assign responsibility for the brutalities.

The stream of reports in the \textit{London Daily News} and other publications, however, inflamed the British public even further. Protests and “letters to the Editor” were continuously sent to the \textit{London Daily News}, which diligently printed each of them.

\textsuperscript{30} n. an offense violating the dignity of a ruler as the representative of a sovereign power. (from Miriam-Webster dictionary)

\textsuperscript{31}MacGahan., 20.

\textsuperscript{32} Temperley, \textit{The Bulgarian and Other Atrocities, 1875-8}, 24.

\textsuperscript{33} MacGahan, 90
In one of the letters printed in the *Daily News*, a reader, Edward A. Freeman shares his indignation with the complacency of the British government, and the semantics used as an excuse to delay reaction:

It seems to me, that a correspondent of the *Daily News* has just as good means of finding out the truth as any one whom the Foreign Office can employ, and it also seems to me that there is much greater likelihood that the truth which he finds out will be honestly given to the public. ... To those who are robbed, murdered, or ravished it cannot greatly matter whether the robber, murderer, or ravisher is a Bashi-Bazouk or a Circassian. In either case, he is an alien intruder in the Bulgarian land, dinging his wicked will on the Bulgarian people.\(^{34}\)

Some did seek to protect Christians in the Ottoman territories. Lord Derby wrote to Sir Henry Elliot: “You cannot urge too strongly upon the Porte, in brining to their notice Mr. Baring’s statements, the necessity of taking effective measures to afford redress, execute justice and provide at once for protection of the Christians.”\(^{35}\)

However, correspondence between Sir Henry Elliot and J. H. Dupuis, the Vice Consul of Great Britain in Turkey, and the British Government, and what was made public by Disraeli and the Foreign Office in London, indicated that there was a total lack of communication and information between the British government, its Foreign Office and its representatives abroad.

Had it not been for the *London Daily News* breaking the story, and for MacGahan insisting that *Daily News* editor John Robinson dispatch him to Bulgaria, that very likely the “Bulgarian Horrors” would have remained just a record, a mere blurb, in the Foreign Office papers.

\(^{34}\) London Daily News, July 5th, 1876, p. 6

MacGahan’s incredibly fast writing, and his use of “gallopers” to deliver segments of his articles as he was still writing, enabled him to break story after story before the government had even prepared a report or a rebuttal. When his stories hit the press and then the streets the next day, the public was reading accounts of such inhumane and horrid occurrences, while as yet the government was silent. This in turn diminished the public’s trust in the government. While MacGahan was penning story after story and capturing the public’s hearts and minds, the government was just beginning to investigate. 36

The British government had also other concerns about support for the Ottoman Empire. According to Baring’s report, the perpetrators tortured, raped and enslaved the inhabitants of the Rhodopi region. They also burned everything to the ground, including livestock, harvest, production facilities. The province they destroyed had been sending more than 800,000 Turkish pounds in tax revenues and it was one of the more lucrative lands of the Empire. 37 Why was this important to the Crown: the loans that the British empire had given to the Turks, were large and they needed to be repaid. According to the Ottoman empire’s checkbook, all re-payments towards the loan have been ceased in March 1876. 38

On August 1, MacGahan wrote that the Ottoman tax collectors came to the ravished villages demanding payments, “just as though nothing had happened.” 39

36 Norman Dwight Harris, “The Effect of the Balkan Wars on European Alliances and the Future of the Ottoman Empire,” in The American Political Science Review, vol. 8, no. 1 (February 1914), 111
37 “Doc. 451, British Documents on Foreign Affairs Report by Mr. Baring on the Bulgarian Insurrection of 1876,” 351.
38 Öner, E., 2005. Osmanlı İmparatorluğu ve Cumhuriyet döneminde mali idare, (Ottoman Empire and fiscal administration in Republic Era), Maliye Bakanlığı Araştırma ve Planlama Kurulu Başkanlığı Yayınısı, Ankara, quoted in Seda Ozekicioglu and Halil Ozekicioglu’s First borrowing period at Ottoman Empire (1854-1876): Budget policies and consequences
39 MacGahan, 32.
His indignation and outrage streamed from the pages of the paper, as he retold tales of “women submitted to every species of degradation and infamy that the foul and debased imagination of a savage could invent. Nay more!” He kept bringing account after account of horror, rape, piled skulls, bodies that have been left unburied, with clothes still on, but no flesh, as wild dogs have picked them... “unbridled lust of a barbarous race.”

His reports also roused intellectuals from every corner of the continent, equally enraged by the the reports and the lack of action by governments. The roll included Victor Hugo, Fyodor Dostyevsky, Ivan Turgenev, Oscar Wilde and Charles Darwin. Wilde wrote a series of sonnets inspired by the horrors. Most famous of them is the “Sonnet-Massacre of the Christians in Bulgaria.”

CHRIST, dost thou live indeed? or are thy bones
Still straightened in their rock-hewn sepulchre?
And was thy Rising only dreamed by Her
Whose love of thee for all her sin atones?
For here the air is horrid with men’s groans,
The priests who call upon thy name are slain,
Dost thou not hear the bitter wail of pain
From those whose children lie upon the stones?
Come down, O Son of God! incestuous gloom
Curtains the land, and through the starless night
Over thy Cross the Crescent moon I see!
If thou in very truth didst burst the tomb
Come down, O Son of Man! and show thy might,
Lest Mahomet be crowned instead of Thee!

40 MacGahan, 150
41 MacGahan, 150
Chapter 7. The World In Motion

As MacGahan’s reports from July 23 to August 22, 1876 kept the readers of the *London Daily News* engaged in the plight of the Bulgarian victims of atrocities, protests around the country increased in frequency and number of people. Britons sought reversal of the Crown’s complacent policy towards Bulgaria.

Even as reports kept arriving from diplomats as Consul Richard Reade, who was overseeing the Danube “villauyet” for the British Empire, and by Lord Derby, they were dismissed by Disraeli as “utterly untrustworthy rubbish.” Disraeli argued that these “hear-say rumours” were created for party purposes, pointing his finger to the Liberal party and its leader, William Gladstone.

While the political power games in London continued, MacGahan’s daily descriptive dispatches kept the Bulgarian atrocities in the public’s mind. MacGahan’s cited Greek, Bulgarian and German leaders.

The Greek Consul, who is not friendly to the Bulgarians, tells me of 12,000 wretched women and children marched into Tatar Bazardjik, nearly all of whom suffered the vilest outrages. He tells me of Bulgarian fathers who killed their wives and children in order to put them out of reach of the ferocity of the Bashi-Bazouks. The German officials tell me of the bodies of men cut up and flung to the dogs in villages near their own railway stations; of little children of both sexes maltreated and brutalized until they died; of a priest, whose wife and children were outraged and slaughtered before his eyes, and who was then put to death, after the most fearful torture, the details of which are too abominable to be re-told.

He found many willing to recall the violence:

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I have the story of a young and beautiful girl, who having found means to obtain the rudiments of an education, opened a school in her native village, and tried to do something for the education of the poor people about her, who is now lying in prison here sick and broken hearted, whose story is too sad for recital. The French Consul tells me of Bashi-Bazouks relating to circles of admiring listeners how they cut off the heads of little children, and how the dismembered trunks would leap and roll about like those of chickens; and I shut my ears and say, "This is enough; I do not want to hear any more; I do not care to investigate any further." It does not matter to me that a few more or less have been committed. You cannot increase or diminish the horror of the thing by mere statements of round numbers. I shall leave the statistics to Mr. Schuyler and Mr. Baring, and shall be quite willing to accept their estimates.44

MacGahan’s reports were re-printed by the *New York Times*, and smaller newspapers across the United States, including the *Inter Ocean* in Chicago, the *Galveston Daily News* in Houston, Texas, The *Daily Evening Bulletin* in San Francisco, the *St. Louis Globe Democrat* and smaller publications like the *Georgia Weekly Telegraph and Georgia Journal & Messenger* in Macon, Georgia. Word traveled as far as Australia. The *South Australian Register* noted: “It is reported that the Emperor of Russia has addressed the Turkish Ambassador at St. Petersburg in the following terms: ‘The atrocities in Bulgaria have deprived Turkey of the sympathies of Europe.’” 45

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44 MacGahan, The Turkish Atrocities in Bulgaria, 12.

45 The Turkish Atrocities, The Southern Australian Register, September 20, 1876 p.5
Chapter 8. William Gladstone and the Eastern Question

Amid intensive public activity in early September of 1876, Gladstone published his pamphlet “Bulgarian Horrors and the Question of the East.” He stressed the importance of Britain’s response and how it would be judged by history. He stressed that three actions were urgent:

It is urgent, in addition to the termination of the war,
first to put an end to the anarchical misrule, plundering and murdering which still desolate Bulgaria;
second to make effectual provisions against its recurrence by excluding the Ottoman government from administrative control not only in Bulgarian;
Third, to redeem by these measures the honor of the British name, which in the deplorable events of the year has been more gravely compromised than I have known it in any former period. 46

Some considered Gladstone’s pamphlet a “political move,” because he took so long (two months after he learned about the atrocities from the London Daily News reports), but his name and political gravitas furthered the discussions and a public protest movement. 47

Already since early August, MacGahan’s reports had inflamed British consciousness, and the new technology of the telegraph was enabling reports sent by MacGahan reach worldwide audiences very quickly.

Eugene Schuyler, MacGahan’s companion on his investigative trip in Bulgaria, wrote the foreword to the book that combined all of MacGahan’s dispatches. But while MacGahan was

46 William Gladstone, Bulgarian Horrors and the Question of the East (London: John Murray, 1876), 26.
reporting for the *London Daily News*, Schuyler reported to the U.S. Minister in Constantinople, who in turn was reporting to President Ulysses S. Grant.
Chapter 9. Eugene Schuyler’s Preliminary Report to Minister Maynard

Schuyler wanted to publicize the atrocities as soon as possible. So, on August 29th, through MacGahan’s paper, the London Daily News, Schuyler published his “Preliminary Report to Minister Maynard.” In it he confirmed MacGahan’s counts: 65 Bulgarian Villages destroyed by the Turks, and 15,000 Bulgarian men, women and children brutally slaughtered. Because it came from an American government official, it was regarded as credible.

MacGahan’s passionate and descriptive reporting, together with Schuyler’s official report, brought the story into the forefront of politics, and inspired Gladstone to craft his pamphlet. Reports of the Turkish atrocities against Bulgarians continued streaming on the pages of the London Daily News. Through this persistence, Bulgaria became one of the world’s first “fashionable causes.”

In some of his reports, MacGahan strayed from the main storyline, to reflect on the image of Bulgarians in the Western mind.

 Most people in the west thought of Bulgaria and its inhabitants as rural uneducated, almost barbaric people. I think people in England and Europe generally have a very imperfect idea of what these Bulgarians are. I have always heard them spoken of as mere savages, who were in reality not much more civilized than the American Indians; and I confess that I myself was not far from entertaining the same opinion not very long ago. I was astonished, as I believe most of my readers will be, to learn that there is scarcely a Bulgarian village without its school; that these schools are, where they have not been burnt by the Turks, in a very flourishing condition’ that they are supported by a voluntary tax levied by the Bulgarians on

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themselves, not only without being forced to do it by the Government, but in spite of all sorts of obstacles thrown in their way by the perversity of the Turkish authorities; that the instruction given in these schools is gratuitous, and that all profit alike by it, poor as well as rich; that there is scarcely a Bulgarian child that cannot read and write; and finally that the percentage of people who can read and write is as great in Bulgaria as in England and France. Do people who speak of Bulgarians as savages happen to be aware of these facts?"  

MacGahan presented the culture, history and habits of the Bulgarian people, bringing them out of obscurity, and contradicting the stereotype of a barbaric nation. He asserted that Bulgarians were an “educated, hardworking, industrious, honest, civilized and peaceful people,” who lived in “well-built towns with solid stone houses... that would stand a not very unfavorable comparison with an English or a French village.”

49 MacGahan, The Turkish Atrocities in Bulgaria, 24-25.

50 MacGahan, 25.
Chapter 10. Lord Beaconsfield, The Ottoman Empire and the Six Powers Conference

As public opinion mounted against the Turks, Disraeli persisted in his efforts to preserve the status quo in relations with the Ottoman empire. In August 1876, he gave his last speech at the House of Commons, and moved to the House of Lords as Lord Beaconsfield. Despite all the Royal support for Disraeli, Gladstone’s pamphlet had quickly sold more than 200,000 copies and roused more public indignation.

Gladstone now rallied his influential supporters. They included John Thadeus Delane, editor of the Times; James Anthony Froude, later editor of Fraser’s Magazine; Edward Augustus Freeman, Oxford scholar, historian and contributor to the Saturday Review; the poet laureate Alfred Tennyson, Thomas Carlyle, Charles Darwin, John Ruskin, and the Duke of Argyll.51

The Ottoman Empire was going through a political crisis of its own. Diplomatic pressures caused Sultan Abdul Azis to be deposed and replaced by Sultan Murad V, who was replaced soon after by Abdul Hamid II.

The new Sultan announced his first foreign policy act soon after stepping into power. He arranged a conference of the Six Powers on November 20 in Constantinople. France, Germany, Italy, Austria, Russia and England sent delegates. They were to discuss the rest of the Balkans and the unstable relations they had with the nations of Europe. MacGahan’s editor, John Robinson, also sent him to Constantinople to cover the conference. 52

The delegation reached no agreements and made no official announcements on the issues in Bulgaria. Raising the possibility of a war between Russia and the Ottomans, MacGahan’s editor told him to go to St. Petersburg, and report on Russian preparations.

51 Rathbone, “Gladstone, Disraeli and the Bulgarian Horrors.”

52 New York Tribune, November 20, 1876, 1.
Chapter 11. On the Eve of the Russo Turkish War

Russia’s last attempt to reach an agreement with the Porte was rejected. The new sultan Abdul Hamid firmly believed that the British Empire would stand behind the Sublime Porte’s decision and support them in any military conflict.

However, the political landscape in London had drastically changed. Largely because of the Bulgarian atrocities, MacGahan’s reports and Gladstone’s pamphlet, the British Empire was compelled to take a stance of neutrality.

On April 24, the Turkish charge d’affaires, Tavfek Bey, received a note from Prince Alexandr Gortchakov, Foreign Minister of Russia, which announced that “His Majesty, my August Master, sees himself compelled to his regret, to have recourse to force of arms. Be therefore so kind as to inform your Government that from today, Russia considers herself in a state of war with the Porte.”

J.A. MacGahan, so committed to the Bulgarian cause, joined the Russian Army in its advance to the Danube. Along the way through Romania, he stopped in Bucharest where he had left his wife and young son. He secured them in a hotel, and established a connection between Barbara (his wife) and the London Daily News courier who would telegraph his dispatches to London. Barbara was re-writing and also translating his letters in Russian, and sending them to Russian newspapers, putting MacGahan’s name on the map of Europe, Russia, and America at once.

After a short stay with his family, MacGahan rejoined the Russian Army at Kishinev and wrote his first review of the Czar’s troops on April 26. In his captivating manner of describing

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53 Sublime Porte, also called Porte refers to the government of the Ottoman Empire.

54 Walker, Januarius MacGahan, 193.
not only battlefields, but the mood, the light, and the colors of the scenes, MacGahan’s
description of the beginning of the war resembled a painting more than a war dispatch:

The spot was well chosen, on a gentle undulating
hillside, which enabled the spectators to see the
whole army at once, as the lines rose behind each
other higher and higher up the slope.
It was a beautiful sunny morning and the bright
colours of the uniforms, the glitter of bayonets
flashing in the sunshine, and the broad blaze of
light reflected from a long line of polished field-pieces.
There was something strangely impressive and awful
in this prolonged silence and immobility.
The crowds looking upon the serried lines so
silent and motionless, became themselves silent,
and gazed with wonder and awe.55

MacGahan stayed with the Russian Army throughout the year of the war, despite renewed
injuries to his leg and back. Ever a man of action, he rode alongside his Khiva-days friend
General Skobelev. MacGahan continued reporting about the advances and defeats, and the
thousands of Russian, Turkish and Bulgarian men who perished in the war. Finally, on March 3,
1878, with the Russian Army at the gates of Constantinople, the Turks capitulated and the San
Stefano treaty was signed, liberating Bulgaria after more than 500 years of Turkish Yoke.

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55 J.A. MacGahan and Archibald Forbes The War Correspondence of the London Daily News 1877: With a
Connecting Narrative Forming a Continuous History of the War Between Russia and Turkey (London: McMillan
&Co., 1877, 33.
Chapter 12. Death in Constantinople

The Irish journalist and House of Commons member of Parliament T. P. O’Connor, wrote about MacGahan’s contributions to the Eastern Question solution:

The Eastern Question was finally solved by two men, neither of whom was a soldier, the great work of liberating enslaved Christians of the East from the vilest tyranny that ever cursed the world, owes, perhaps as much as to the legionaries of the Czar. One of those men was Mr. Gladstone, the other was Mr. J.A. MacGahan. Journalism has had many glorious triumphs; but the proudest achievement which brightens its annals is the salvation of a country by the pen of a special correspondent.56

Januarius MacGahan died in Constantinople, on June 9, 1878, not in battle, but of typhus. His humanitarian calling took him by the bedside of his typhoid-stricken friend, Lt. Francis Greene, an American military observer. Despite his mother’s and his wife’s pleas to leave, he stayed and took care of Greene. Greene recovered, but MacGahan contracted the deadly typhus and died just three days before his 34th Birthday. He was buried in Pera, a suburb of Constantinople, with correspondents, military officials, and diplomats in attendance. None was more affected by his death, than General Skobelev, who was said to have wept at MacGahan’s gravesite.

MacGahan’s remains were returned to the United States on the warship "Powhatan" in August 1884, and he was buried in Maplewood Cemetery in New Lexington, Ohio, on September 12, 1884. One of his friends, General Phil Sheridan, was there to honor his memory.57 General Sheridan was the one who had introduced him to James Gordon Bennett Jr. and his career as a journalist.

Years later, T. P. O’Connor will write about MacGahan:

Mr. J.A. MacGahan. Never was a happier choice for a journalistic task, as investigating the Bulgarian horrors, made. He had all the requisites: Courage to face the frowns of the Turkish authorities Perseverance to overcome the myrad shaped obstacles they might put in his way. He was a man of good judgement and unfailing accuracy And his pen, while picturesque, never was tempted to sacrifice fact to effect. 

58 T.P. O'Connor. 628
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