

The text of four letters between Robert Graves and P. McGregor to R. Graves concerning the Ilenden Uprising.

Contents

Graves to O'Connor, Thessaloniki, August 4th, 1903.
O'Connor to Graves, Monastir, August 4th, 1903.
P. McGregor to R. Graves, Monastir, September 8th, 1903
P. McGregor to R. Graves, Monastir, September 27th, 1903

R. Graves to N. O'Connor

Thessaloniki, August 4th, 1903

[F.O.195/2157, ff.221r-223r, No.238].

Travellers who arrived by yesterday's train report that the inhabitants of Tekesova, Banitza, Ekshisou and Patele, all in the same district have risen, the men joining the insurgent bands and the women and children taking to the mountains, and a rumour is also current that the insurgents have attacked three Turkish villages on the Monastir side and set fire to the ricks.

It would seem from all this as if the attempt was being made to carry out the plan referred to in my despatches No. 222 of July 23rd and 231 of July 31st, and my telegram No. 43 of July 28th, to concentrate the activity of the bands in the mountainous districts of the three Karadjovas (Vodena, Yenidje and Ghevgheli) and endeavour to bring about a general rising of the Bulgarian villagers.

Graves

P. McGregor to R. Graves

Monastir, August 4th, 1903

[F.O.195/2157, ff.254r-257(a)r No.109].

Sir,

In confirmation of my telegram of today's date to His Majesty's Ambassador posted to you for transmission to His Excellency on account of the interruption of telegraphic communication, I have the honour to report that on the evening of the 2nd instant, the Feast of the Prophet Elias (C.S.), the signal for an insurrectionary movement in the plain of Monastir and the adjacent districts was given by the simultaneous firing of several stackyards on the outskirts of the town and in the outlying village of Brusnik.

One of the first acts of the insurgents was to cut the telegraph wires connecting Monastir with Salonica, Perlepe and Okhrida, the telegraph poles with wires and insulators being removed along a tract of nearly a mile in the neighbourhood of Ekshi-Su, where dynamite was also used to destroy a small bridge and a "point" on the railway line. The Vali informs me, moreover, that several hundred metres of rail near Batitsa had been tampered with by the removal of the connecting bolts; but, as the daily train arrived only an hour late on the following evening, the damage must have been speedily repaired.

Simultaneous attacks were made on Resna, Dolentsi, Ramna and Lera in the Kaza of Okhrida, where the Mussulmans, being well armed, were able to repulse the insurgent onslaught after some hours fighting, the only casualty on the Turkish side being, as far as I am aware, one woman killed and several barns and stackyards reduced to ashes. The mail which had left Monastir for Koritsa on the same evening was obliged to return here as the road for Resna was rendered impassable by the fusillade and it was not till twelve hours later that it started again accompanied by twenty-five gendarmes.

As the Vali had in the meantime received news of an attack on the small body of troops at Smilevo, he immediately despatched 350 men thither with the others to pass through the Resna district and report on what had taken place there; but this afternoon he was still without news and it is rumoured that the road between Monastir and Resna has been cut. This is the case with the road leading from Resna to Koritsa which has been destroyed in several places along the western shore of Lake Presba.

Severe fighting took place on the same night at Pribiltsi, south of Krushevo, and it is stated that the insurgents have occupied both Krushevo and Kyrchevo, murdering the Turkish officials and burning the Government buildings in the former. It will probably be a day or two before authentic information regarding these towns is available, but a force of nearly 800 men has been sent in that direction and the Vali admits that the situation there causes him the greatest anxiety. At present no travellers can approach Krushevo and I have learned that the insurgents have seized three cartloads of foodstuffs on the way to that town from Monastir and have murdered the Turkish drivers in charge.

It is impossible at this moment to estimate the proportion of the rural population which has abandoned the villages, partially or en masse, and retired to the mountains in obedience to the summons of Sunday evening; but they must number several thousands, including not only Exarchist Bulgarians, but Patriarchists and Vlakhs hitherto represented as staunch adherents to the Hellenic propaganda.

Among the insurgent villages in the immediate vicinity of Monastir I may mention the following: Khristofor, Pozdesh, Gorno Crizari, Dolno Crizari, Karaman, Tyrnovo, Magarevo and Zhabyani, while in a more northerly direction are Kukurechani, Tsyrnaboka and others.

There is no definite news from the Kazas of Perlepe and Kyrchevo where, however, the movement is said to be general: and in the Presba district the only villages whose names I have ascertained as having joined the insurgents are Kozyak, Tsaridvor, Dyrmeni and Gherman.

The Vali informs me that the Christian Villages in the district around Buf and Florina, such as Resna, Armensko, Popolzhani, Zabyrdeni, Banitsa, Hassan Oba, are deserted, and the same is said to be the case in the Koreshta region between the Lakes of Presba and Kastoria where only children and aged people remain.

Krushograd has been burned down by the inhabitants, and in many instances the peasants, who had previously sold as much of the harvest as had been gathered in, took the opportunity of destroying by fire the houses and other property of Greek and Mussulman landowners before leaving.

The outbreak of the revolution, although generally expected to take place within the next fortnight or three weeks, seems nevertheless to have come as a surprise to the Authorities and on Saturday last the Vali treated with ridicule the idea of impending disturbances. His Excellency's

first act was to apply for reinforcements, and eight battalions are expected here tomorrow or next day from Uskub, while others are said to be on their way from Upper Albania via Prizren, Lyuma and Debra. The Vali has assured several of the Consuls that he has taken every precaution to prevent disturbances in Monastir itself where the Mussulman population is irritated and restless, and he has placed strong pickets on the surrounding heights on order to guard against an insurgent attack on the town.

The railroad has been repaired and it is hoped that by tomorrow telegraphic communication with Perlepe, at least, will have been restored.

McGregor

P. McGregor to R. Graves

Monastir, September 8th, 1903

[F.O.195/2157, ff.493r-494r, No.125]

Sir,

In continuation of my despatch No. 122 of the 4th instant, I have the honour to report the following trustworthy details regarding recent events at Klissura and Neveska.

On the 5th ultimo Klissura was occupied without resistance by 600-700 insurgents, half of whom took up their quarters in the town while the remainder camped on the surrounding hills. During the twenty-two days of the Bulgarian occupation contributions to the amount of 1.300 were raised and the insurgents lived at the expence of the inhabitants; but no excesses were committed and local administration was carried on without a hitch.

On the 19th ultimo 350 of the insurgents went to join Chakalaroff who occupied Neveska next day, and when, on the 26th ultimo, the approach of a large Turkish force under Edhem Bey was announced, the remainder of the Bulgarians retired slowly from Klissura, taking up positions on the hills in the neighbourhood where a sharp engagement of short duration ensued. 120 insurgents, including the Voivoda Popoff, Ivan Popof, voivoda of the Kastoria district, was born in 1871 in the village of Liaski near Nevrokop. After the Ilinden Uprising, he returned to Bulgaria were killed and the Turks lost twenty or thirty killed and six wounded.

The bands were not pursued by the Turks who, before entering the town, proceeded to the villages of Zagorichani, Bobishta and Mokreni which they sacked and burned after massacring 150 of the inhabitants, thus making up the figure of 300 ultimately quoted by the Authorities as representing the insurgent losses. (See the official communique inclosed in my despatch referred to above).

No excesses appear to have been committed by the Turkish at Klissura.

With regard to Neveska, the garrison of 120 men was overpowered by Chakalaroff, and 50 or 60 soldiers were killed the Mudir.

and the civil officials fled to Sorovich and the barracks and Government buildings were destroyed. The insurgents levied contributions to the amount of 1.300 and remained in the village till the 27th when, on the approach of five or six battalions from Florina and Monastir, they retired without risking an engagement.

No Turkish excesses are reported from Neveska.

McGregor

P. McGregor to R. Graves

Monastir, September 27th, 1903

[F.O.195/2157, ff.590r-593r, No.130].

Sir,

I have the honour to transmit herewith a translation of a document purporting to be a declaration by Chakalaroff and other insurgent leaders and giving an account of events during the insurrection in the Kastoria district together with a detailed estimate of the loss of life and property caused by the Imperial troops.

The number of villages and towns destroyed is given as twenty-two; so that, according to Kuncheff's statistical description of Macedonia, at least 16.000 persons are at present homeless in that region, and if the detailed list of murders committed in the eight villages whence reliable information is said to have been obtained, is correct, the loss of life may be calculated at more than 2.000 souls.

As I had the honour to state in my immediately preceding despatch of the 23rd instant, the Authorities, while attributing the destruction of the villages to the insurgents, admit the accuracy of the Bulgarian statistics in this respect and, in cases where I have been able to make representations, such as those of Krushevo, Shtyrkovo, and Slivnitsa, do not attempt to deny the excesses committed by the Bashibozuks. Hilmi Pasha informs me that, in addition to the six Bashibozuks already sentenced for pillage at Krushevo, 30 more have been arrested and that similar steps have been taken with regard to a score or two of individuals, including several Beys, who were implicated in the sack of the other villages mentioned. Other arrests have also been made in the Kazas of Kastoria and Florina and the fact has been made public in the official newspaper.

A partial confirmation of the amount of havoc said by the Bulgarians to have been wrought in the district is afforded by the attitude of the Authorities towards six hundred women and children belonging to fifteen villages in that Kaza who arrived here in a deplorable condition a few days ago. They were not allowed to enter the town, but I went to see them and afterwards made representations to the Inspector General, urging upon him the necessity of affording them shelter and relief. His Excellency was evidently determined that they should not enter Monastir, but he provided them with bread and then had them conducted to the neighbouring village of Bukovo where they remained for two days, making several ineffectual attempts to enter the town in a body, a step which I have no doubt had been dictated to them by the Committee. Hilmi Pasha, who personally questioned a deputation of these people, made no demur when they related their tale of spoliation and violence, and finally sent them back to their villages escorted by a Major of Gendarmerie who, in my presence, received orders to see that they should be housed in various monasteries until their own cottages could be repaired. The local Authorities of Kastoria have also been instructed to provide timber for the reconstruction of the ruined houses, a mill is to be built in each village at the public expense, assistance is to be given to enable the crops to be harvested; all stolen livestock is to be restored or paid for, and the taxes for the current year are to be remitted.

It is evident from the enclosed document that the troops made a complete sweep of the Kastoria district and that, wherever the main body of the insurgents may be, their confidence has been rudely shaken. As a matter of fact, no engagements have been reported in that district for the last fortnight and Hilmi Pasha informs me that Chakalaroff, with a band of eighty men, has fled to the neighbourhood of Kolonia where he is being actively pursued.

I believe that the rebels are still holding their own in the Kyrchevo district and that operations against them are in course of preparation.

At the present moment the general situation may be said to have improved as far as active hostilities are concerned, but troops have been despatched in some numbers to Sorovich where more than twenty battalions are now concentrated; for what purpose is unknown, as the Inspector General professes ignorance, stating that the movement has been ordered by the Palace.

On the other hand, I hear that the last insurgent reserves have been ordered to hold themselves in readiness and it is said that many of the troops now at Sorovich will return here immediately.

An outburst of fanaticism took place at Sorovich last week when a number of soldiers plundered and defiled the Greek church. Hilmi Pasha has ordered that the guilty parties shall be tried by Court Martial and similar steps are to be taken with regard to the officers and soldiers responsible for the sacking of the Monastery of Jebren, in the Morikhovo district.

The soldiers are still openly selling their loot in the streets of Monastir and one of my colleagues assures me that several officers have likewise been engaged in this traffic.

McGregor