

BELL AND ANDERSON: A SCOTTISH PARTNERSHIP IN WALLACHIA

This study has been provoked by a footnote of the late P.P. Panaitescu, printed over forty years ago, but recently quoted by Miss C. Bodea.¹ The note in question concerns "George Bell," the addressee of certain letters by Ion Cîmpineanu. It states that "George Bell" is a conspiratorial name, hiding the identity of a Polish emigré in London. Not a bit of it! George Bell was no figment of the imagination; he was a Scottish merchant whose home in London stood not a quarter of a mile from the house in which this article is being written.

The firm of Bell and Anderson was apparently founded in 1834. In that year Lord Palmerston directed the British Consul at Bucharest to afford every assistance to "Mr. George Bell who is about to establish a Commercial House at the Port of Galatz." The letter containing these instructions to Consul Blutte was dated 11 September 1834 and was to be delivered by Bell himself.² Blutte however died about this time, and on 21 January 1835 Bell saw the newly appointed consul Colquhoun in London.³ Presumably he had been to Rumania and back in the meantime. The French Consul Mimaut, writing from Bucharest on 30 November 1834, reported that a vessel of 115 tons belonging to a boyar of Bucharest would soon leave Giurgiu under the Wallachian flag and, it was thought, would be freighted by Bell and Anderson, just recently established there. One English ship had already been sent out to Galatz for the firm, and a second was expected.⁴ Colquhoun, writing to the Duke of Wellington from Bucharest on 16 March 1835 to recommend Mr. Hutchinson, the chief clerk of Bell and Anderson, for the post of British Vice-Consul at Brăila, says that the house "has been for some time established here," which suggests a longer

1. P.P. Panaitescu, "Planurile lui Ioan Cîmpineanu pentru unitatea națională a românilor" *Anuarul Institutului de istorie națională*, Cluj, III, 1926, p. 67, quoted by C. Bodea, *Lupta Românilor pentru unitatea națională 1834-1849*, Bucharest, 1967, p. 228.

2. F.O. 78/242.

3. F.O. 78/265.

4. Hurmuzachi, *Documente*, XVII, p. 440.

period of existence than six months.⁵ Possibly Anderson had been in Wallachia for some time and had engaged in trade on his own account before going in to partnership.⁶ A French commercial report by Cochefert (16 August 1835) describes the firm as dealing in the produce of the country and especially as exporting timber; it had the monopoly of selling British goods there wholesale. Anderson exported a great number of staves for barrels.⁷

Things seem to have gone well for about two years. On 31 October 1836 Mimaut reported a scheme for a bank to be established at Bucharest with funds provided by Bell and Anderson. The Wallachian boyars, he said, very much desired such an institution; but in the existing state of society it would be an extremely risky speculation. Bell and Anderson would probably not undertake it, at any rate for the time being.⁸

During this autumn two ships sent out to the firm had trouble at the entrance to the Danube. Anderson, visiting Jassy, told Gardner, the British Consul there, that the *Hero* had been fired on by a Russian gunboat to compel her to bring to. Bell too was in Jassy at the end of November; he complained not only about the *Hero*, but also about the *Star*, which was alleged to have been wrecked at Sulina owing to interference by the guard boat. In neither case, it seems, were the allegations true. Gardner writes to Palmerston (24 February 1837):

... Mr. George Bell, from motives which I trust he will be enabled to explain satisfactorily, has been privy to both transactions, and his representations have been wilfully incorrect. For some time, my Lord, circumstances had thrown a strong degree of suspicion on my mind, which I most reluctantly yielded to, that Mr. Anderson, Mr. Bell's partner, was not actuated by honorable intentions towards myself during his visit to Jassy, and Mr. Bell also during his detention here, when I had shown him all the hospitality his situation required and my limited means allowed, left me with an altered impression of his character...⁹

But long before Bell and Anderson's intrigues over the *Hero* and the *Star* had excited this unfavourable comment, a far more disastrous scandal had

5. F.O. 78/265.

6. He witnessed the inventory of Blutte's effects on 30 December 1834, as "André Lockhart Anderson, négociant, Anglais" (F.O. 195/98, pt. 1).

7. Hurmuzachi, *Documente*, XVII, p. 512.

8. Hurmuzachi, *Documente*, XVII, p. 652.

9. F.O. 78/311, No. 13, Gardner to Palmerston, Jassy 24 February 1837.

broken. On 28 November 1836 Anderson sent in to Colquhoun a declaration of his insolvency, whereupon his house and property were sealed. He later informed Colquhoun that he alone was insolvent, as Bell had dissolved the partnership before the Vice Consul at Brăila, who was their own chief clerk. The dissolution had been kept secret, and the firm had taken delivery of goods against bills drawn on Anderson and had shipped them on to vessels at Brăila. This led to an outrageous act of "piracy" by a creditor who knew the state of Anderson's affairs. The *Henrietta* left Brăila towing a barge, which had been loaded with 30 skins of tallow and other cargo so that the ship should be light enough to clear the sandbanks. A quarantine boat from the Turkish shore, having on board the Under Captain of the port, an Austrian named Fattutta, and seven or eight men, and accompanied by two other boats, pulled alongside and demanded the tallow. When the captain of the *Henrietta* refused, Fattutta cut the painter, towed the barge ashore and shipped the tallow on to an Austrian vessel. As the quarantine boat flew the Wallachian flag, it was to the Prince, Alexandru Ghica, that Colquhoun had to address himself for satisfaction. He was in an unpleasant dilemma. "I deeply feel," he wrote to Cartwright, the British Consul at Constantinople on 15 December 1836, "for the persons whose property has thus been taken from them and put on board English vessels, at a time the purchasers must have known the state of their affairs, but still must protect the British vessels from an attack unwarranted by any Laws." ¹⁰

There were other unpleasantnesses connected with the bankruptcy which we need not go into here; enough has been said to show that Bell and Anderson did not behave honestly in the hour of crisis. It is not surprising that both had difficulty in getting permission to leave the Principalities. Bell was detained in Jassy because the Austrian Agent refused to sign his passport in consequence of claims against him by Austrian subjects. ¹¹ And Anderson was still in Bucharest eight months after the bankruptcy, though all his property had been sold to pay his debts. ¹²

An attractive light is thrown upon Anderson at this juncture by the Reverend Nathaniel Burton, an Irish clergyman, who was in Bucharest from 22 to 25 June 1837. ¹³

10. F.O. 195/143, No. 12, Colquhoun to Cartwright, 15 December 1836.

11. F.O. 78/311, No. 12, Gardner to Bidwell.

12. F.O. 78/313, No. 2, Lloyd to Palmerston, Bucharest, 12 July 1837.

13. Nathaniel Burton, *Narrative of a Voyage ... in the years 1836-1837*, Dublin, 1838, p. 278. This book was brought to my attention by an article by Claudiu Isopescu, which I cannot now trace.

... There are only two or three English residents beside the consul, who came here on mercantile speculations which failed; at the head of this firm was a Mr. Anderson, a highly cultivated young Scotchman, who had been an officer in the Russian army. I had the pleasure of meeting him, and spent a most agreeable evening with him at the house of one of the principal boyards, with whom he resided; of this establishment he appeared the sole master; the boyard was introduced to me more as a guest than the master of the house—he spoke French, and was a colonel in the army of Wallachia.

Mr. Anderson informed me that it was owing to the want of principle on the part of the Wallachians that the establishment failed; his wife, a Scotch lady, had a fortune which could not be touched; she was on a visit at Terapea, near Constantinople, whither he was on the eve of going to join her. He now endeavoured to awaken the inhabitants of Bucharest to a like love of literature with himself, exciting them, if possible, to write some fugitive pieces, to work the printing-press, to influence the drama, and rouse by every means their dormant muse, if they possessed any, and showed me a small magazine printed under his auspices at Bucharest. He is a noble, liberal-minded man, and I trust his exertions may not be as the sun shining upon a dung-hill...

This passage raises several questions. First, who was the boyar in whose house Anderson was living? Evidently this nobleman had received the Anderson family into his home, when their property was sold up with no provision for their subsistence. Secondly, what can have been Anderson's activity in the cultural field? Can we discover the "small magazine printed under his auspices?" These problems must remain for the present unsolved.

Of Anderson no more is heard. But George Bell continued to have connections with Rumanians. It is clear that he had become very anti-Russian at some point which is not easy to determine. The London firm had had a notable clash with the Russians in the affair of the *Vixen*. This was a ship chartered by George Bell & Co., loaded with salt from Wallachia, and taken under the direction of James Stanislaus Bell, brother of George, to Soudjuk-Kalé in Circassia. By reason of its cargo and its use of an unauthorised port, the *Vixen* was regarded by the Russian authorities as a smuggler and was confiscated. This happened on 24 November 1836, just after the affairs of the *Hero* and the *Star*, and just as Anderson was declaring his insolvency. But perhaps the affair of the *Vixen* was not so much a cause of the Bell brothers' hostility to Russia as a consequence

of it. James Bell seems to have taken the *Vixen* on her voyage for the express purpose of bringing the question to an issue, and he was backed in his action by David Urquhart, Secretary at the British Embassy at Constantinople, who was the editor of *The Portfolio*, a periodical entirely devoted at that period to providing evidence of Russia's imperialist activities. Urquhart had passed through Bucharest, staying from 13 to 16 July, and having two or three interviews with the Prince, which had caused a sensation there.¹⁴

A letter entitled "Russian Aggression on British Commerce" published in *The Times* on 27 April 1836, though signed anonymously "...and Co.," is from internal evidence written by George Bell. The note on "Russian Toll and Quarantine on the Danube" in the issue of 30 April clearly comes from the same pen. But after the affair of the *Vixen* George Bell put his own name to a letter which he wrote to *The Times* on 2 February 1837. Of the contents of this letter it is sufficient here to note the following passage:

My attention was first directed to the question of the trade with the coast of Circassia in consequence of an application to me by the Government of the Turkish principality of Wallachia, and afterwards by the farmers of the salt mines of that country, to take an interest in the extension of the sale of the salt produced from those mines; and as very advantageous proposals were made to me, I set on foot inquiries, and found, on examination of the state of the surrounding countries, as to their supply of salt, that no one afforded a greater or better débouché or market than the eastern coast of the Black Sea.¹⁵

It is interesting to learn that the affair of the *Vixen* had this Rumanian background.

Panaiteescu's idea that "George Bell" was a cover name for a Polish émigré, though mistaken, is yet in itself a pointer to Bell's activities; he was very much involved with the affairs of anti-Russian expatriates. The "Mr. Werner" of whom Ion Cîmpineanu writes to Bell in a letter of 22 December 1838 is Woronicz one of Czartoryski's adherents.¹⁶ Bell, in fact, acted as an "accommodation address" for the émigrés. It was to George Bell's house too that, when Cîmpineanu was visiting London on his unofficial political mission to the West in the summer of 1839, his nephew Ion Ghica directed a letter to him.¹⁷ In October

14. F.O. 78/288, No.23, Colquhoun to Palmerston, Bucharest, 25 July 1836.

15. *The Times*, 3 February 1837, p. 6; reprinted in *The Portfolio*, V, 1837, pp. 549-555.

16. Panaiteescu, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

17. Bodea, *op. cit.*, p. 225

Cîmpineanu wrote to Ghica that the Bell family had done all they could for his comfort while he was suffering from an affection of the throat.¹⁸ Probably Cîmpineanu was staying at their house, 81 Guilford St. Certainly Ghica called there in the following year; he says that he met James Bell at George's house. "Bell le Circassien est déjà à Londres depuis une semaine, c'est un homme de beaucoup d'influence, surtout dans le cas où le ministère changeait, ce qui est très probable. C'est un homme extrêmement vénérable; j'ai fait sa connaissance chez son frère, il prend beaucoup d'intérêt à notre cause. Il nous reproche de n'avoir pas fait parler la presse anglaise."¹⁹

George Bell was soon to meet his end far from the domesticities of Guilford St. His death in October 1841 is announced in a laconic news item: "Mr. G. Bell, the owner of the *Vixen*, died on the 28th of October last, at Acoyapa, in Central America, whither he had been carried as a captive by the natives, in retaliation for some British aggression."²⁰

This account of Bell and Anderson leaves some interesting questions for further investigation. First, who was the boyar in whose house Anderson lived after his bankruptcy? One is tempted to wonder whether it can be Ion Cîmpineanu himself.²¹ Such generosity was characteristic of the man. He was as we have seen closely involved with Bell; he corresponded with him on political matters, and he was later his guest in London. It is interesting to observe the Scottish presence in Rumania. Colquhoun, the Bell brothers, Anderson, Urquhart: all supporters of Rumanian nationalism and all Scots.²²

The second unsolved mystery is the identity of the "small magazine printed under his [Anderson's] auspices." One might suggest Cezar Bolliac's *Curiosul*.²³ It has been pointed out that the editor and contributors of *Curiosul* were almost all members of Cîmpineanu's group.²⁴

E.D. TAPPE

18. *Ibid.*, p. 228.

19. Al. Cretzianu, *Din arhiva lui Dumitru Brătianu*, Bucharest, 1933, p. 101.

20. *The Times*, 21 February 1842.

21. For Cîmpineanu and Colquhoun see R.R. Florescu, "R.G. Colquhoun, Ion Cîmpineanu and the Pro-Western Opposition in Wallachia, 1834-1840," *The Slavonic and East European Review*, no. 97, June 1963, pp. 403-419.

22. The Scots have been active in Eastern Europe for centuries. For earlier commercial activity in Rumania see E.D. Tappe, "Patrick Simson: A Scottish Merchant in the Moldavian Potash Trade," *The Slavonic and East European Review*, no. 75, June 1952, pp. 494-513. Around 1960 the large proportion of Scots among the British diplomatic staff at Bucharest earned it the nickname of "The Scottish Legation!"

23. For *Curiosul* see Ovidiu Papadima, *Cezar Bolliac*, Bucharest, 1966, pp. 84-90.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 99.