Bourchier, James David (1850-1920), journalist, was born at Baggotstown, Bruff, co. Limerick, Ireland, on 18 December 1850, the fourth son of John Bourchier JP, of Baggotstown, and his wife, Sarah, née Aher, of La Rive, Castlecomer, co. Kilkenny. Bourchier was a scholar and classics gold medallist at Trinity College, Dublin, and graduated BA there in 1873. He subsequently won a scholarship at King's College, Cambridge, and was placed seventh in the first class of the classical tripos (1876). Shortly afterwards he became a school master at Eton College, near Windsor, where he remained for ten years, despite difficulties caused by his deafness. In 1888 he left Eton for Romania and Bulgaria, where he acted as a special correspondent for The Times, becoming the paper's Balkan correspondent in 1892. He had earlier also contributed occasional articles to publications including The Globe and Macmillan's Magazine.

For fifteen years Bourchier was based in Athens before moving to Sofia. Sociable, with a talent for both languages and music, despite his hearing difficulties, he soon came to know everyone of note in the Balkans and worked behind the scenes of Balkan politics and negotiations for a generation. He also wrote knowledgeably on archaeology and travel. His sympathy with Balkan nationalism, together with his courage and willingness to identify himself with a cause, won for him a unique place in the politics of the Balkan peninsula. He often served as intermediary between the Cretan insurgents and the Greek authorities, and acted unofficially as confidential adviser to Prince George of Greece when, in 1898, the latter became high commissioner of Crete. When Bulgarian peasants in Macedonia rose against Turkish rule in 1903, he alerted the British public to their grievances. In 1911–12 he was entrusted by King George of Greece and the Greek politician Eleutherios Venizelos on one side, and by King Ferdinand of Bulgaria and M. Gueshov on the other, with many of the secret negotiations preceding the Balkan alliance, which he regarded as the only solution to the Balkan question. However, Bourchier's political and professional credibility was severely strained when Bulgaria chose to align itself with Austria-Hungary and Germany in 1915, since his reports had not suggested such a decision. Much as he deplored the part played by Bulgaria in the First World War he did not abandon his empathetic reporting, and The Times increasingly sought to distance itself from its long-serving correspondent.

In 1915 Bourchier left Sofia and went to Romania, and in 1917 moved to Odessa and Petrograd to report on the early phases of the Russian Revolution. On returning to England in 1918 he retired from The Times, and devoted himself to the forlorn attempt to secure what seemed to him a just and final settlement in the Balkans. Such concern resulted in his being asked, in 1920, to become Bulgaria's consul-general in London. However, before he was able to do so, Bourchier died of heart failure at Sofia on 30 December 1920, and was buried with high honours at Rilo monastery, Bulgaria. He had never married.

E. F. B. Grogan, rev. Chandrika Kaul

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