

CHAPTER IV

An Imagined Tormentor

The first mention of Miss Paraman the governess appears in 1866. On April 21 Curzon jots in his diary: "Miss Paraman took Sophy and me to see Miss Wilson. Mama took Affy. and Blanche and Welch to Derby."¹ Miss Paraman, in Curzon's words, had "grey eyes, thin hair and a large thin mouth."² Curzon's daughter Irene adds to the description by telling us that she was in the habit of wearing "long, voluminous skirts edged with braid."³

Pictures show Curzon about the age of six as a bright, sensitive and lively child. He probably had turned to his new governess, looking for maternal affection and attention. It was not unnatural for him to have done so. Governesses were an integral part of British

¹ Diary 1866, CA.191.

² Notes on Early Life, CA.20.

³ Baroness Ravensdale, Little Innocents: Childhood Reminiscences (London, 1927), p.10.

upper-class life. Tradition relegated the mother's job to the governess; children were totally in her charge and appeared briefly at breakfast, at lunch and shortly before bedtime. Churchill was to write glowingly about these women who brought up their charges with devotion and care. He said, "It is a strange thing, the love of these women. Perhaps it is the only disinterested affection in the world. The mother loves her child; that is maternal nature...but the love of a foster-mother for her charge appears absolutely irrational."¹

But Churchill was blessed with the plump Mrs. Everest who seemed to have belonged to a totally different species from Miss Paraman. Churchill said of Mrs. Everest, "My nurse was my confidante. Mrs. Everest it was who looked after me and tended my wants. It was to her I poured out my many troubles."² Because of Mrs. Everest's reassuring presence, it did not matter that his own brilliant, beautiful, socialite mother Lady Randolph Churchill should appear infrequently. He was to say lovingly of his own mother, "She shone for me like the evening star. I loved her dearly - but at a distance."³

About his Miss Paraman, Curzon recalls in totally different vein:

She shut us up in darkness practised upon us every kind of petty persecution, wounded our pride by dressing us (me in particular) in red shining calico petticoats (I was obliged to make my own) with immense conical cap on our heads round which, as well as on our breasts and back

¹ W. Churchill as quoted by Martin Gilbert, Lady Randolph Churchill (London, 1969), p.93.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

were sewn strips of paper bearing in enormous characters written by ourselves the words Liar, Sneak, Coward, Lubber and the like. In this guise she compelled us to go into the pleasure ground and show ourselves to the gardeners. She forced us to go through the park at even distances, never communicating with each other, to the village and to show ourselves to the villagers. It never occurred to us that these good folk sympathised intensely with us and regarded her as fiend. Our pride was much too deeply hurt.¹

Victorian children do not seem to be unfamiliar with this humiliation of being made to parade with placards stitched to their backs. Kipling testifies to this in his story "Baa Baa Black Sheep"²

Curzon tells us that Paraman made beating a normal part of their experience. These punishments took different forms. He said:

She spanked us with the sole of her slipper on the bare back, beat us with her brushes, tied us up for long hours in chairs in uncomfortable positions with our hands holding a pole or blackboard behind our backs.³

What seems more shocking is that she punished them for sins never committed and punished them as being self-condemned. To break the innate pride of her charges, Curzon said, she used humiliation as her control device:

She made us trundle our hoops, all alone, up and down a place in the grounds near the hermitage where were tall black fir trees and a general air of gloom of which we were

¹ Notes on Early Life, CA.20.

² Jonathan Gathorne-Hardy, The Rise and Fall of the British Nanny (London, 1972) pp.84-8.

³ Notes on Early Life, CA.20.

intensely afraid. She forced us to confess to lies we had never told, to sins which we had never committed and then punished us savagely as being self-condemned. For weeks we were not allowed to speak to each other or a living soul. At meals she took all the dainties herself and gave us nothing but tapioca and rice.¹

One of the humiliations Curzon remembered most clearly was knowing how young Curzon cared for the respect of the butler at Kedleston, Miss Paraman forced him to write to the same butler asking him to make a birch with which Curzon was to be whipped for lying! She also punished Curzon by making him wear his red calico petticoat, stand with his face against the wall and then invited the butler to come and see him thus. The butler involuntarily exclaimed, "why you look like a Cardinal," and Curzon recalls, "I could have died of shame."²

But what perhaps appears as most tragically shocking is the Scarsdale parents' total oblivion to the indignities heaped upon their children and the latter's inability to confide in them. Curzon records, "She persecuted and beat us in the most cruel way and established over us a system of terrorism so complete that not one of us ever mustered up the courage to walk upstairs and tell our father or mother". He added, "I suppose no children so well born or so well placed ever cried so much or so justly."³

Horrifying as this catalogue of punishments sounds, taken in the Victorian context, it does appear plausible. Biographies of that period are full of accounts of flogging and repression in

¹ Notes on Early Life, CA.20.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

school rooms. Victorian children seem to have taken an amazing amount of battering of the mind and body as a part of the process of growing up. Social historian Lawrence Stone says:

In the seventeenth century the early training of children was directly equated with the baiting of hawks or the breaking in of young horses or hunting dogs. These were all animals which were highly-valued and cherished in the society of that period, and it was only natural that exactly the same principle should apply in the education of children.¹

Governesses who generally ended up as frustrated old maids seem to be a breed well-equipped to carry out this task of crushing the will and thereby snuffing out evil in their charges. They had a reputation for malice and ill-temper, "If an old maid should bite anybody, it would certainly be as mortal as the bite of a mad dog."² As a result of the shortage of suitable males "due to the low level of nuptiality among younger sons and to the rise in the cost of marriage portions, there developed in the 18th century a new and troublesome phenomenon :the spinster lady who never married, whose numbers rose from under five per cent of all upper-class girls in the 16th century to 20 or 25 per cent in the 18th century."³ The only possible occupation for these well-educated spinsters was to turn governesses. They suffered from economic hardship and social stigma. "Not a relation, not a guest, not a mistress, not a servant, the governess lived in a kind of status limbo. By reason of her position, she was also treated

¹ Lawrence Stone, The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800 (Penguin Books, 1979), p.116.

² Daniel Defoe as quoted by Stone, op.cit., pp.244-5.

³ Ibid, p.243.

as almost sexless. Not a lower class servant and so open to seduction, not a daughter of the house and so open to marriage offers, she was nothing."¹ Being virtually shut out of society she took out her frustration on the children.

This tradition continued in the Victorian era and it is but natural to assume that the domineering and dominating Paraman left an ineffaceable scar on her young and sensitive charge. Leonard Mosley says, "That Curzon was permanently damaged by the treatment he received at the hands of Miss Paraman there is no doubt at all."² David Dilks has said, "Lord Scarsdale appears to have been so entirely detached from his children's upbringing that he did not realise their plight. Nor did his wife, whom George worshipped from afar."³ Kenneth Rose says, "To the end of his days, Curzon believed that he had passed a miserable childhood."⁴ Lord Ronaldshay, the official biographer of Curzon, writes:

His early years were not a time of unmixed happiness. They were dominated by a strange and forceful influence in the person of the lady who for ten years had charge of the upbringing of George Curzon and the four members of the family next to him in age. There can be little doubt that this ferocious discipline to which she subjected her unfortunate charges did much to foster that rebellious spirit of the existence of which, sometimes latent, at other times disastrously active, George Curzon was himself aware throughout his life.

But in the light of new findings on Blanche

¹ Stone, *op.cit.*, pp.244-5.

² Leonard Mosley, *Curzon*(London, 1960), p.8.

³ David Dilks, *Curzon in India*, 2 Vols.(London, 1969), Vol.I, p.18.

⁴ Kenneth Rose, *Superior Person*(London, 1969),p.19.

⁵ Earl of Ronaldshay, *The Life of Lord Curzon*, 3 Vols. (London, 1928) Vol.I, pp.17-8.

Scarsdale, Paraman's role in her children's life must come under renewed scrutiny. The question arises whether the mother who took such tender pride in her son could have given blanket control over him to a woman without having made proper inquiries about her nature. Supposing, for a minute, that Paraman had made a condition - which cannot be ruled out - that there was to be no interference in her management of the children. Even then, the very physical constraints of the family wing at Kedleston would have made it impossible for her to embark upon or perpetrate a reign of terror. It is generally maintained that "...the Victorian nursery as it finally crystallized" was "an austere area, furnished with furniture not needed elsewhere. Austere and remote - situated at the top or in far-flung parts of the house, among servants. When there was a fire it was the children or servants who got burnt."¹ At Kedleston, however, the family occupied the right hand, three-storeyed wing, with the nurseries being located on the ground floor. The servants were far-removed in the left-hand wing of the house. At Kedleston the rooms were comparatively small and placed back-to-back to form a square. Unlike in many British ancestral homes, they do not stretch in a line along long corridors. In these circumstances, concealment of sound becomes well-nigh impossible. It is not possible to flog a child without an adult from an upper floor coming to hear it. The Curzon children did cry. "I suppose no children so well born or so well placed ever cried so much

¹ Gathorne-Hardy, op.cit. p.58.

² Interview with 3rd Viscount Scarsdale.

or so justly," Curzon wrote.¹

It is also important to remember that we have only Curzon's version. No other Scarsdale children seem to have left any accounts of Paraman's behaviour.² There are no available records of her antecedents.³ She seemed to have none she could call her own for she left whatever little money she had to Curzon's elder sister Sophy.

In fact it was Mr. Kenneth Rose who first started me thinking about the authenticity of the Paraman phenomena, hinting at the account being exaggerated. Though there is evidence to show that Paraman wrote several letters to Curzon while he was at his first prep school at Wixenford, not one of them seem to have survived. In fairness to Curzon, however, it must be admitted that few of his mother's letters written at this period survived either. So it does not appear that the Paraman letters were deliberately destroyed. Curzon reports from his school at Wixenford that he has received "a very nice long letter from Miss Paraman of 3 sheets and a half, telling me all about the nice day and picnic they are going to have with cousin Wily and I wish I could be with them."⁴

The one apparently available letter from Paraman is to Lord Scarsdale and is written from St. Benedicts. It seems innocuous enough. She writes, "I fear poor Mr. Senhouse is in a bad state; dear George has written me nice kind letters, and seemed much concerned to find his grandma so worn looking so thin and ill. I suppose the boys will soon be home again."⁵ Miss Paraman also thanks Lord Scarsdale

¹ Notes on Early Life, CA.20.

² Interview with 3rd Viscount Scarsdale.

³ Interview with Kenneth Rose.

⁴ Curzon to Lord & Lady Scarsdale, June(undated) 1869, CA.155.

⁵ Paraman to Lord Scarsdale, Jan.2, 1876, CA.272 (Mr. Senhouse was Lady Scarsdale's father).

for his cheque. We know from Kenneth Rose that Blanche left a gold necklace in her will for Miss Paraman.¹ Viscount Scarsdale gave me excerpts from Curzon's brother Alfred's diary soon after their mother's death in 1875 which records, "Tuesday, 20th April. Very fine day. Papa gives Miss Paraman a gold necklace of dear mama's which she said she wished Miss Paraman to have."²

Among one of the rare recorded episodes in which Paraman features in the lives of the Scarsdales, she emerges as a vague, absent-minded governess hardly in command of the situation and not the strong powerful personality Curzon described her to be. Actually Curzon has recorded the situation in a letter to his father.³ Apparently Miss Paraman was escorting the Scarsdale children on their annual vacation to Brighton. The party consisted of children, nurses, servants, one of whom by name of Samuel being in charge of the luggage. Alas! when the party reached London and in the transfer from St. Pancras to Victoria station to catch the Brighton train, Samuel got left behind with half the luggage. To add to the confusion, Samuel had no ticket as Miss Paraman absent-mindedly had taken them all with her. In the ensuing administrative collapse, the fourteen-year-old George Curzon claims to have retrieved the situation. He bundled off Paraman, nurses, and the children on to the Brighton train, got another ticket for Samuel and arranged for the rest of the luggage to be despatched. Surely this could not be the same boy who only four years ago had been so terrorised by Paraman that he could

¹ Rose, op.cit., p.21.

² Alfred Curzon, Diary, Courtesy 3rd Viscount Scarsdale.

³ Curzon to Lord Scarsdale, May 2, 1873, CA.159.

not even tell his parents so.

That the Curzon parents cared dearly for their children is now established without doubt. For one whole year before sending their son to his first prep school at Wixenford, the parents corresponded with another parent, a Mrs. Philips who had a son there.¹ In a subsequent letter, while assuring the anxious parents that there was also a nurse on the premises, Mrs. Philips had warned, "one thing we think is that the boys are obliged to bathe in cold all the year round."² Blanche Scarsdale also seems to have conveyed some of her anxiety to Mary Powles, the headmaster's wife, for she writes back saying, "It is no wonder that every mother should feel anxious on first parting with her child."³ Surely such a mother was incapable of tolerating any form of violence to her children.

For a moment let us go back to the premise that Paraman was the horror Curzon has made her out to be. It only stands to reason that Curzon be damaged permanently. Such a fracturing of the ego in early life could not but linger over and cloud adult behaviour. No restorative energy of youth could hope to wipe out the scale of humiliation he had been made out to suffer. The undiminished actuality of the past would always warp subsequent behaviour. But strangely the ten-year-old Curzon, emerging from a three-year reign of terror in the nursery, appears apparently unscathed. The letters written from Wixenford show that his spirit is bouyant and his confidence boundless. Soon after reaching school he drops and

¹ Mrs. Phillips to Lord & Lady Scarsdale, June 11, 1868, CA.155.

² Mrs. Phillips to Lord & Lady Scarsdale, March 24, 1869, CA.155.

³ Mary Powles to Lady Scarsdale, undated, (1869), CA.155.

breaks his watch, a very precious commodity in those times. But unlike a child fearing a harsh punishment, he casually informs his mother about the incident and asks her in a business-like manner, "So in your next letter, will you tell me if I am to send it to Leroy and all about the directions and registering."¹

His letters from school are full of requests for hampers of food, seedlings, stamps, extra pocket-money and even presents for his friends. The son pleads, cajoles and even bullies. While requesting his mother to select a pen-knife as a present for a friend, he tells her precisely what he wants. "It should be of ivory and flat...not round as some knives are but as flat as the small pencil knife or the one we cut pencil with," and it should be purchased only from Ratcliffe's.² Curzon was eleven when he wrote this letter and he writes with the confidence of a child who is assured of parental cooperation. Parcels from home arrive and he exultantly records receiving,"netting things and beautiful warm things, splendid balls." Besides, there are - "jam pots, grapes, pineapple and cakes, apple and jelly alright... the cake looks a beauty."³ Once in a moment of exuberance he precociously signs a letter saying:

Believe me your loving son,

Georgie, Porgy put in a pie.

He kissed the girls and made them cry.⁴

¹ Curzon to Lady Scarsdale, May 23, 1869, CA.155.

² Ibid, Feb. 11, 1870, CA. 156.

³ Ibid, Nov. 22, 1871, CA.157.

⁴ Ibid, Jan. 28, 1870, CA. 156.

He complains to his parents about the headmaster's greedy wife, "I think Mrs. Powles must have taken nearly all my goodies away for there are only a few left."¹ He tells his mother about his unmanly homesickness: "I felt leaving you much more than I did when I first came to school, for I cried in bed last night, and was ready to cry every minute."² I have quoted instances at length only to demonstrate that the intimacy and the affection that existed between the parents and the son was such that it is difficult to imagine such a son being unable to muster up courage to go and tell his father and mother about the indignities heaped upon him by a governess. He could report to his parents in a letter about his headmaster's wife stealing his goodies without fearing consequences of the master's reading the letter, not an unusual practice in boarding schools; and yet in his own house he remained mute. This is not to say that the Paraman phenomenon was a total fabrication. I have no concrete evidence to say that was so. But circumstantial details do indicate that the accounts could be exaggerated. Miss Paraman was probably a harsh disciplinarian. Her taking away at mealtimes all the dainties "and leaving the children nothing but tapioca and rice" may have been responsible for much of Curzon's anxiety over food in later life. From Wixenford Curzon had written to his mother "Will you tell Miss P we do not have bread and scrape here but bread with more butter than we do at home."³

¹ Curzon to Lord and Lady Scarsdale, May 12, 1869, CA.155.

² Curzon to Lady Scarsdale, undated, (1869) CA.155.

³ Ibid, May 12, 1869, CA. 155.

Fifty years later, Curzon complained to his second wife, "The Chef gives me the most abominable meals...at every meal since you left I have swallowed (or refused to swallow) the horrid little mould of pink blammange with a bisected apricot or pear swimming at its base."¹ But the claim that she carried on the scale of persecution attributed to her specially under the very nose, as it were, of Blanche Scarsdale is difficult to maintain.

The question must naturally arise as to why a recourse had to be made to such myths? Again, there is no tangible explanation. As I said earlier, Curzon's is the only available account we have of Paraman and he makes her out to be an ogress. The other mentions of Paraman are by his second wife Grace and his daughter Irene and are both based on information given out by Curzon. His brother Alfred's diary mentions the Xmas presents given by the governess.² The description of Paraman appears in Curzon's Notes on Early Life and seems to have been specially written for a biographer in the years of his Viceroyalty.³ The Notes are not dated but handwritten on notepaper stamped with the address, 1 Carlton House Terrace, the elegant Regency House in London. Though Curzon took this house just before embarking on his Viceroyalty, he only came to occupy it upon his return, which goes to show that the Notes could not have been written before the termination of his Viceroyalty. Could it be that for the humiliating end to his Viceroyalty and the lonely years of wilderness that followed thereafter Curzon was looking for a

¹ Curzon to Grace, Aug 14, 1919, CA.283.

² Interview with 3rd Viscount Scarsdale.

³ Notes on Early Life, CA. 20.

scapegoat and found one in Paraman? In India he had set himself a lofty pace fashioning a pattern of behaviour for himself based upon his past successes. But alas! The pathetic actuality could hardly be reconciled with the grand dreams. The result had to be accounted for and explained away, if not for others, for his own peace of mind. Perhaps he did it by making himself out to seem more sinned against than sinning.

What is strange is that he forgave Paraman. Though he catalogued her sins, he does not seem to display signs of a murderous rage against his vindictive tormentor. It was almost in a mood of fond nostalgia that he took his second wife Grace to Kedleston and tried to look for the chinks in the schoolroom walls where he stuffed the hated tapioca pudding.¹ The battering of the spirit does not seem to have left a lasting resentment. He says, "of the Scarsdale children in her charge, not one of us ever reproached her with the past; and I believe that had it been recalled to her memory she would have dismissed it as a baseless and wicked fabrication." Curzon adds:

She was a good teacher, even for subjects such as French or music, of which she knew nothing herself. In her ordinary and sensible moments she was devoutly attached to us, and continued to be so until she died in 1892 when I went and stood by her grave. She taught us good habits; economy, neatness, method and a dislike of anything vulgar or fast. That the good woman was devoted to us I believe there can be no doubt. She was so proud of me and was always wanting me to go and see her during her illness in later life. I look back on her as one of the most extraordinary phenomena I ever encountered. She represented a class of governess and a method of tuition (in entire independence

¹ Marchioness Curzon of Kedleston, Reminiscences (London, 1955), p. 101.

of the parents) which have both disappeared. With children who are constantly with their parents such a system would be incapable of concealment. I must say for all of us that we honestly forgave her for the misery she caused us.¹

Could Curzon really have been so forgiving had Paraman been the tormentor he has made her out to be? Or was it that the torments were more imagined than real? We know that in later life Curzon did disparage his father's role in his life and career. He made himself out to be a self-made man who enjoyed little paternal support or sympathy. To his friend Lord Riddel Curzon said, "I may say I am a self-made man... I had to fight my way in life..."² Lord Scarsdale may not have had the means and the influence to further his son's career, but as we have seen, he followed it with great interest. A strong bond existed between father and son. In fact, so strong were the ties that Curzon was prepared to risk his wife Mary's displeasure by coming to his father's defence. Once when on trip to England from India Mary had complained of neglect by the Scarsdales, Curzon had promptly written back to say, "I am sorry you think my people have not been quite what they ought to have been. I am sure that my father has nothing but the deepest affection for you and is incapable of intentional neglect."³ When Prime Minister Salisbury first offered him the Indian Viceroyalty

¹ Notes on Early Life, CA.20.

² Lord Riddel, Lord Riddel's Intimate Diary of the Peace Conference and After(London,1933), p.412.

³ Curzon to Mary, May 28, 1901, M.C.P.

Curzon had hurried off to tell his father adding, "I have told no one else but Mary."¹ I have taken these examples to show the contradiction between Curzon's claim and actuality and in doing so tried to point out the attempt - however subconscious - at a distortion of reality.

¹ Curzon to Lord Scarsdale, July 22, 1898, CA.266/1-3.