

CHAPTER V

Wixenford 1869-72

In May 1869, at the age of ten, Curzon went to his first school at Wixenford in Hampshire. Before going up to Wixenford ten-year-old Curzon had a ceremonial leave-taking. He wrote: "Dearest Papa, Mama & grandmama. I invite you to come and see my little leave-taking remembrances to those I love, & to others I feel interested in & I hope you will like them. Will ten.30 suit you? Please say. Always your loving child George." A toast was raised in his honour by the staff on this occasion for along with this letter on a sheet of paper is recorded in Curzon's writing "One shilling for John Strelton - William Thompson and John Robinson, to drink my health, wish me success, & I don't think they can get intoxicated with it."¹ The Scarsdale parents obviously thought the event of their son's going to his first school worthy of celebrations.

¹ Curzon to Lord & Lady Scarsdale and grandmother, undated [May 1869], CA.192.

Blanche personally escorted him to school. Curzon recalls "I remember to this hour the horrible moment when I saw the fly and white horse drive away carrying my mother, who was dearer to me than anyone in the world."¹ Mrs. Philips, the mother of Bertie, who was already at Wixenford had told the Scarsdales that the school was expensive costing as much as £ 150 a year per child, a fact which did not deter the parsimonious Lord Scarsdale.² She told them that besides the Headmaster Rev. R.Cowley Powles, "there is...also a second master or Mr. Dunbar who never loses sight of the boys night and day - so there is no bullying or romping at night - he throws himself into all their occupations."³ Curzon later wrote that, "Powles did not associate us very greatly himself owing to the masterly influence and predominance of Dunbar but we were always delighted when he walked or talked with us especially when he talked of Kingsley or his Oxford days."⁴ Training in imperial attitudes came from an unexpected quarter at Wixenford. The Headmaster Rev. R.Cowley Powles had moved his school from Blackheath to Hampshire in order to bring it within the spiritual influence of his old friend, the Rev. Charles Kingsley. Curzon wrote to his mother, "we have just come back from church where Mr. Kingsley preached; he preaches so simply, so that all may understand."⁵ In 1886 Charles Kingsley had declared he no longer subscribed to

¹ Notes on Early Life, CA.20.

² Mrs. Philips to Lord and Lady Scarsdale, June 11,1868, CA.155.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Notes on Early Life, CA.20.

⁵ Curzon to Lady Scarsdale, May 12, 1869, CA.155.

equality of mankind:

Nearly a quarter of a century spent in educating my parishioners and experience with my own and others' children...have taught me that there are congenital differences and hereditary tendencies which defy all education from circumstances, whether for good or evil...I have seen also, that the differences of race are so great, that certain races, e.g. the Irish Celts, seem quite unfit for self-government and almost for the self-administration of justice involved in trial by jury.

Charles Kingsley laid great stress on the importance of hereditary traits in forming character. No amount of education or training could really change them. Kingsley used Darwin's argument of survival of the fittest to justify British domination of other races:

Physical science is proving more and more the immense importance of Race; the importance of hereditary powers, hereditary organs, hereditary habits, in all organised beings from the lowest plant to the highest animal. She is proving more and more omnipresent action of the differences between the races.²

Charles Kingsley, along with Ruskin, Carlyle and Tennyson, had defended the action of the Jamaican Governor Edward Eyre for ordering death penalty on the negro politician G.W.Gordon and hundreds of other rebels in the Jamaican crisis of 1865. Upon Eyre's return home in 1866 Kingsley praised him as representing "English spirit of indomitable perseverance, courage and adventure..." The martial law, passed with Eyre's

¹ Rev. Charles Kingsley as quoted by Ronald Hyam, Britain's Imperial Century, 1815-1914(London,1976), pp.82-3.

² Ibid.

sanction resulted in the killing or hanging of 439 persons. John Bright, J.S. Mill, Spencer, and, interestingly, Darwin, had opposed Eyre's actions.¹

Curzon wrote regularly to his parents from Wixenford, keeping them informed of his activities. Every trivial detail is mentioned: whether it is the "rounders" they play or the digging in the garden, or the lavatory where he went to wash hands! He told his parents about the hours he kept: "we go to bed at 8.30. School hours are from 7 till 8; from 9 till 11; from 12 to 1; from 3 to 5; from 7 till 8 and in the times between we are either out, or playing music. I am as happy here as I could expect to be, but I miss home very much."² The parents visited him regularly for he begins one letter to Blanche saying, "I should not have much to tell you today as you have come here the other day."³ She brought him a hamper of goodies which he generously distributed, to most of the boys but they did not quite go round the school.⁴ Curzon's letters are full of demands for hampers, garden plants, postage stamps, invisible ink. Several letters begin with "Now for my requests." They seem to have been almost always met. He writes with the confidence of a child who is not merely indulged but is also aware that he is so. Curzon's mother's relations also make much of him. "Uncle Uppy" received him at St. Pancras

¹ Hyam, op.cit.

² Curzon to Lord and Lady Scarsdale, May 12, 1869, CA.155.

³ Curzon to Lady Scarsdale, undated, [1870], CA.156.

⁴ Ibid.

station when he goes up to London for a visit. There again he is regaled by presents, "grandmother gave 5 sh. Uncle Wilfred 10 and Uncle Uppy 5 more."¹

The Headmaster Rev. Cowley Powles writes a glowing account of him to Lord Scarsdale. "Nothing can be more satisfactory to me than your son's conduct throughout the whole of his school-term. He has been uniformly industrious, obedient and well-mannered."² Comparing Curzon with his younger brother Alfred who was also at Wixenford, Rev. Cowley Powles says, "Alfred has not George's intelligence..."³ Second Master Dunbar makes 'great favourites' of Curzon. In Curzon's words he was, "a short, stout gentleman with a mustache, whiskers and a little beard; - as a master he was for the most part detested by the boys to whom he was savage and cruel".⁴

Nevertheless he seems to have a soft spot for Curzon. This may have perhaps been due to the fact that Curzon was an extremely good-looking young boy with pink cheeks and a milk-maid's complexion. Flogging by masters, far in excess of complaint, was a normal part of a schoolboy's experience in 16th and 17th-century England, a bundle of birch rods being considered an essential part of the master's equipment. The flogging covered various lapses whether academic stupidity, or disobedience and lying. The widely accepted procedure resorted to was to lay the child

¹ Curzon to Lady Scarsdale, op.cit.

² Powles to Lord Scarsdale, July 30, 1869, CA.155.

³ Ibid, June 23, 1870, CA.156.

⁴ Curzon to Lady Scarsdale, May 5, 1869, CA.155.

on a bench and to flog his naked buttocks with a bundle of birches until blood flowed.¹ Within days of first reaching school Curzon was reporting to his parents, "Gaskell has been caned twice and two other boys once: they have a whack on each hand for no great offence but more for disobedience."² Powles also believed that to spare the rod was to spoil the child: "He used to cane sometimes but very rarely on the hands leaving that as a rule to Dunbar and I remember once he swished me but for what offence I have not the least recollection."³

The homosexual sadistic motivation to such flogging in school is not to be ruled out. A pamphlet of 1669 has been cited by Lawrence Stone where victimised boys complain "our sufferings are of that nature as to make our schools to be not merely houses of correction, but of prostitution, in this vile way of castigation in use, wherein our secret parts...must be the anvil exposed to the immodest and filthy blows of the smiter."⁴

Beatings were justified as being the only method of inducing learning. But the savagery of the beating makes one feel that for the masters they provided a release for their own frustrated libidos. Many of them remained unmarried all their lives. Dunbar died a bachelor. He may have betrayed homosexual tendencies. In his first year at Wixenford Curzon was reporting to his mother, "Mr. Dunbar was pleased with my bottle of scent."⁵ What is interesting

¹ Lawrence Stone, The family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500-1800 (Penguin Books, 1979), pp.116-9.

² Curzon to Lord and Lady Scarsdale, May 12, 1869, CA.155.

³ Notes on Early Life, CA.20.

⁴ Stone, op.cit., p.279.

⁵ Curzon to Lady Scarsdale, Nov.11, 1869, CA.155.

is that the flogging was not always resented by the boys. As we shall see Curzon himself records with wry humour how he enjoyed the delicious feeling of warmth that ensued a few minutes after the beating. Paradoxically, flogging seemed to often attract boys to the master.

It is generally believed that early sexual feelings are experienced under the stimulation of whipping in normal children. The connection between sexual emotion and whipping has for one a simple physical cause; the strong stimulation of the gluteal region produces heightened sexual excitement as both regions are supplied by branches of the same nerve. But Havelock Ellis prefers to carry the real cause to a psychic state. He feels the whipping arouses the primitive emotions of anger and fear, which have always been associated in courtship and it tends to arouse them at an age when the sexual emotions have not become clearly defined and under circumstances which are likely to introduce sexual associations. From the earliest years, children have been trained to fear whipping and whether inflicted upon themselves or others, it excites anger, nervous excitement and terror. Moreover, if the whipped child has been stripped, the sight of its naked body may add to the excitement.¹ The sight of suffering itself is considered a stimulant to sexual excitement. The sight of a schoolboy being whipped is known to produce sexual excitement in boys who look on. School masters who resort to flogging under minor provocations are often perverts. Ellis cites the classic case of Udall, onetime Headmaster of Eton, noted for his habit of

¹ Havelock Ellis, Studies in the Psychology of Sex, 2 Vols.(New York, 1942) Vol.I, Part II, pp.129-50.

inflicting corporal punishments for little or no cause; he later confessed to sexual practices with the boys under his care.¹ Dunbar could have been such a case.

Flogging at the university died out in 1660s and was certainly on the decline in major elite public schools.² It declined but did not die out altogether as we have seen even in Curzon's time. Actually the brutality should have been less at Wixenford considering it was a small private school run by a clergyman to augment his income by taking in upper-class boys as students. At Wixenford, Archibald Dunbar was the "master of spanking" who, according to Curzon,

executed all or nearly all the punishments whether by spanking on the bare buttocks or by caning on the palm of hand or by swishing on the posterior. I remember well all three experiences. He was a master of spanking, though he used to say that it hurt him nearly as much as it did us. I remember that it was about the 15th blow that it really began to hurt and from thence the pain increased in geometrical progression. At about the 28th blow one began to howl. The largest number of smacks I ever received was I think 42.³

But Curzon did not seem to mind them so much. On the contrary it is significant to note he seemed to remember them with relish. He says:

but comic to relate I still remember the delicious feeling of warmth that ensued about 5 to 10 minutes later when the circulation was thoroughly restored and the surface pain had subsided. With the birch I think he never gave beyond ten or twelve strokes - and that

¹ Ellis, op.cit., p.139.

² Stone, op.cit., pp.279-81.

³ Notes on Early Life, CA.20.

for some particularly grave offence in his bedroom at night¹

As he reached puberty, we find that Curzon began to, perhaps quite unconsciously, attract attention of people with established homosexual tendencies. Their overtures were more mental than physical. At Wixenford there was Dunbar. At Eton there would be Oscar Browning.

Curzon recalls, Dunbar could make, "great favourites - of whom I was one - and though he never spared us one jot or little of his displeasure or punishment if we had provoked either, he could be extremely nice to us when he was in a gracious mood."² Dunbar's beatings did not seem to arouse hatred. Curzon was proud of the attention he got from Dunbar and strove hard for it by rising to be head of school. In his last term he even carried away five prizes. Curzon was elevated to the rank of the school treasurer: "I also under Dunbar's supervision kept the school account... I still have the tin cashbox in which I kept the money and the account books...I believe I was never out by even a penny at the end of the term, and undoubtedly the plan was a wise one as inculcating both business acumen and economy."³ This habit of childhood never left him.

It was that same fussy trait that made him keep a catalogue of his expenses on his first Grand Tour in 1886. "5 days Hongkong

¹ Notes on Early Life, CA.20.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

£ 4-5-0...31,500 miles at a cost of £ 336.5.0, or £ 1.15.0 a day."¹
 After his first marriage it was he who took over the arrangement and management of their two houses. It was Curzon who chose the servants.² Mary was happy to let him do so.

Curzon's second wife complained, however:

He was never content to leave to our secretary, our housekeeper, and our excellent butler the matters that would ordinarily have fallen on them to decide, but insisted on dealing with many small household arrangements himself. For instance, he once sent for me to join him in the hall at Carlton House Terrace to help him choose footman from a number of young men who had been recommended for the position. The candidates were made to walk up and down while we observed their gait with critical eyes; their deportment was noted, and we even inspected their hands, with a view to what these would look like when holding plates and dishes.³

In early May 1923 while he was acting Prime Minister of Britain in the absence of Bonar Law, Curzon was complaining to Grace about having spent a "terrible afternoon with the accounts, which "are appalling." The butler, he raved

spent in the month of March about £ 135 on fish and chickens. It is quite impossible to keep him... He also spends £ 20 a month on milk & cream and I found in his book that he has given us local ice or the like 10 days out of the last 11 and saddle of lamb 3 times in a week. I implored him to desist. But he gave it me again today! I hate his cooking⁴ too so we must part with him at the end of the season.

¹ Note book of First Journey Round the World, CP. Vol.104.

² Nigel Nicolson, Mary Curzon (London, 1977), pp.89-90.

³ Marchioness, Curzon of Kedleston, Reminiscences (London, 1955), p.100.

⁴ Curzon to Grace, May 7, 1923, CA.287.
 Andrew Bonar Law(1859-1923) Prime Minister of Britain,1922-3.