

CHAPTER VII

Oscar Browning

While Curzon was in his first year at Eton several older boys were beginning to take notice of this extraordinarily good-looking fellow. Few new students had the audacity to take on Eton masters the way this young lad had dared. The Lyttelton brothers, nephews of Prime Minister Gladstone, and senior scholars at Eton, along with St. John Brodrick, singled him out for attention. As we have seen, Wolley Dod had complained to Lord Scarsdale that his son was in some danger of being spoilt by associating too much with boys older than himself. This attention had acted as an ego-swelling agent. Brodrick at the pinnacle of his own career recalls his first meeting with Curzon in a railway carriage that he was sharing with Alfred Lyttelton:

Just as the train was moving a tall, breathless, pink-cheeked and well-groomed boy with black hair was shoved into our carriage. He was covered with shame at intruding on so great a personage as Alfred, but recovered a little when we congratulated him on having been pronounced winner of the Prince Consort's French Prize that day, which, as it happened I had won the year before. So reassured, he gaily entertained us until our arrival at Paddington. It was the first introduction of either of us to George Curzon, and from that day in 1874 began a friendship which lasted without shadow for nearly 30 years.¹

¹ St. John Middleton, Records and Reactions 1856-1939, (London, 1939), pp. 25-6.

It was inevitable that Curzon's youthful good looks would soon get him embroiled in a controversy. In his very first year he was drawn towards the congenial, radiant and rotund Oscar Browning. Curzon confesses to being drawn towards Browning because he "gave encouragement and inspiration, hence my life-long attachment to him."¹

At Eton, two masters, Oscar Browning and William Cory had sought to introduce culture to their pupils. The puritanical and athletic Headmaster Dr. James John Hornby, had watched their efforts with dislike and written them off as aesthetes. Cory lost his job for having written some passionate letters to one of his pupils, the son of a Bishop. Browning, however, had stayed on at Eton.

Twenty-two years older than Curzon, Oscar Browning was reputed to have homosexual leanings. In November 1854 at the age of 18, Browning confided to his journal:

I remember well, when I was nine years younger than I am now that I could not help thinking how odd it was I was a man... I am here at Eton. I have been unluckily thrown among a set who do nothing but ridicule my peculiarities among them. I am, according to them, incapable of performing in any way the duties of public or private life.²

Young boys entranced to him. Browning recalls,

I saw a boy named Dunmore. I was struck by his eyes. I have been more so by his manner, everything about him. My wishes, my hopes and fears begin and terminate in him. I have found that he is a

¹ Notes on Early Life, CA.20.

² Quoted by H.E. Wortham, Victorian England and Cambridge (London, 1956) p.28.

lord, but I loved him before.¹

Life in Browning's house was a pleasant combination of high thinking and good living. Artists and men of letters, actors and musicians, Ruskin and Solomon, George Eliot and Walter Pater were frequent visitors and brought with them the atmosphere of culture which Browning relished. He was naturally opposed to the cult of athleticism preached by Hornby. Theatricals used to be given by the boys in the dining room; professionals came from London to perform chamber music. "Arundel prints hung on his walls. Morris curtains framed the windows... Amidst these surroundings, in the genial warmth of the pre-Raphaelite movement, the boys lived and grew from boyhood to adolescence, from adolescence to early manhood"² and fell easy prey to the charms of Oscar Browning.

Browning did not confine himself to his own house boys. Alfred Lyttelton³ and his brother Edward⁴, distinguished athletes and nephews of Gladstone, were a part of his circle. Schools were at that time seething in intense romantic attachments between boys. The cult of Greek love, wherein the participants believe that the highest form of love is between men, was in the air. Boys sent perfumed valentines and addressed each other in gushingly effeminate terms. At Eton such amorous activities

¹ Quoted by Wortham, op.cit., p.32.

² Ibid, p.62.

³ Hon. Alfred Lyttelton, (1857-1913).

⁴ Hon. Edward Lyttelton, (1855-1942).

were referred to as 'spooning'.¹

Browning set himself up to eradicate the evil, he claimed. He invited confidences from the boys saying he was one master to whom they could appeal without restraint. It was but natural that such proposals invited fierce resentment. The teaching staff looked upon these activities with suspicion, fearing a conspiracy to spy. Hornby had found Browning's activities intensely distasteful and it was against this background that Curzon found himself the scapegoat in a battle between Hornby and Oscar Browning.²

Oscar Browning made acquaintance of young Curzon in 1872 and confessed to have been impressed by him as one of the most brilliantly gifted boys he had come across. He had taken upon himself the role of a guardian angel to boys of promise whom he considered were being neglected by their own tutors. He had a low opinion about Curzon's Master Wolley Dod and his anxiety was increased in the following Michaelmas, when the Captain of Wolley Dod's house told him that he was deeply concerned at the companions with whom Curzon was associating.

In the middle of 1873, Curzon was reporting to his mother:

The other day Mr. Browning took me out for a drive about 14 miles out into the country, to see the churchyard where Grey wrote his

¹ Wortham, op.cit., p.97.

² See also Ian Anstruther, Oscar Browning (London, 1983), p.6. He says, "Browning's account of the Eton disaster, told in his Memoirs of Sixty Years, related the facts without the background; so does his nephew, Hugo Wortham, who with the help of his Uncle's diary (now lost, perhaps destroyed) wrote his life in 1927".

elegy, & his tomb there, & also the house in which Milton lived when he wrote his Paradise Lost. I saw the very room in which he wrote it - a little closet about as big as two of the nursery W.Cs.¹

Nevertheless the dangers surrounding Curzon were such that in the summer term Browning received a letter from a senior student who complained about Curzon being maligned for the senior student's having borrowed a rug belonging to Curzon. The senior student said,

I feel it more particularly in this instance, as Curzon is a boy among many whose acquaintance for various reasons I should much like to make, knowing of what superior quality he really is and how often he has been in a dangerous position here. But bearing in mind the state of feeling about these matters, I have, of course, relinquished the idea,² fearing the harm it might do to other boys.

This letter is a testimony of the close relationship Browning had with the student that he should confide in him about such a delicate matter. It also shows how the minds of boys of Victorian public schools were obsessed with passionate concern for other seemingly innocent boys.

The borrower of the rug was the cricket hero Edward Lyttelton. Among the Curzon Additional Papers there is a tiny slip of paper in which Edward has written to Curzon: "My dear Curzon, I send you back your rug which I should not have asked for so coolly, but I had had enough standing up during the day

¹ Curzon to Lady Scarsdale, July 23, 1873, CA. 159.

² Wortham, op.cit., p.100.

and was much obliged for it. Yours very truly, Edward Lyttelton."¹

At Eton, Curzon had found himself the object of promiscuous male attention. There is no explicit mention of his having invited such attention. Nevertheless the fact remains that he was approached by those with homosexual leanings. There was something about Curzon that he began to arouse a passionate protective urge in older boys and masters. They seemed to become obsessed with the dangers of evil companions which they feared surrounded him and might sully him. Whether it was Wolley Dod or Browning or the older boys, each one seems to feel the impact of his youthful good looks and to go out of his way to tell him to preserve his innocence.

The Lyttelton brothers, Alfred and Edward, who were to become his steadfast and loyal life-long friends, were considerably senior to Curzon at Eton. Nevertheless, they seemed to have felt a compelling urge to guard him. Proven scholars, the Lytteltons were also famed for their athletic prowess, Alfred being the Captain of the School. Just a few hours before leaving school, Edward wrote to Curzon asking for his photograph. He was then 19 and an established hero while Curzon was a 15-year-old youngster. Edward, conscious of the awkwardness of his request, goes to pains to provide an explanation in the letter:

Perhaps it may have seemed odd to you that
I who have had so very slight a claim to be

¹ Lyttelton to Curzon, undated, CA.152.

considered as one of your acquaintances should have asked so coolly for your likeness, and I should like to give you an explanation of this and other things.

I have heard a good deal about you at one time and another from Oscar Browning who I have already known for a long time now, and always like and in many ways respected.

What he told me and what I have been told by other people could scarcely fail to awaken in me a considerable interest in a boy of your position, surrounded by so many dangers, and needing at times a helping hand.

I have always been very observant of the various phases of life presented at Eton, and the more I observed, the more it struck me that in a case like this there were difficulties in my path which should warn me to be careful. I well know the sort of view which the world takes to any big fellow hemmed in by the social chains of being what is called a swell, taking any notice of one younger. I know the tone so prevalent which either in jest or earnest ascribes any motives but the right one to a fellow in my position supposing I had, as I often wished, made some effort at becoming acquainted with you.

These considerations induced me against my will, but out of regard for you and the harm that it might do to others if I was incautious, to keep aloof and behave as you may have thought rather oddly in this matter. I could not help, then, making an effort to carry away with me something to remind me of one who has occupied a considerable share of my thoughts giving me cause now and then but seldom, for anxiety and always for feeling much interest.

It is only a few short hours that I have to spend at Eton now, and grievous to me the thought is, for with all the wickedness I love the old place... I can only add that should we ever meet as I hope we shall in days when I shall be free from all these considerations, I shall hope to know you well enough to warrant my asking for a photograph, without needing an apology.

¹ Lyttelton to Curzon, July 27, 1874, CA.152.

This long and elaborate letter goes to show what passionate feelings Curzon seemed to arouse in older boys, in this case Edward Lyttelton who rose to become Headmaster of Eton. Brodrick too, as we have seen, remembered in his old age the physical impact Curzon had made on him as a young boy.

Over and over again, later in life too, mention of Curzon's physical attributes appears like a leitmotif. On his 21st birthday another friend, Richard Farrar warns: "Only beware of the besetting danger of any young man possessed of talent, position and good looks..."¹ Oscar Wilde, who was to befriend Curzon at Oxford, called Curzon, "you brilliant young Coningsby"² and said to him he could "never tire of hearing you being called perfect".³ Walter Pater, of the movement of art for art's sake, took him out to dinner more than once.⁴ Edward Lyttelton once after having written a lengthy screed said, "I must stop alas - what miserable things letters are: the writing of one only brings your rosy cheeks before me in a shadowy kind of way..."⁵

Another Eton Master called Ainger also had made overtures to Curzon, inviting him to a holiday in London. Dod had immediately sat down to write to Lord Scarsdale a letter heavy with insinuation

¹ Farrar to Curzon, Jan. 11, 1880, CA.148.
Richard Farrar, (1856-83).

² Wilde to Curzon, July 30, 1885, CA.146 A.

³ Wilde to Curzon, Nov.1881, CA.146 A.

⁴ Pater to Curzon, May 13, 1884, CA.146 A.
Walter Pater along with Swinburne and Rossetti was a High Priest of the Aesthetic Movement.

⁵ Lyttelton to Curzon, April 22, 1884, CA.152.

"I should be very sorry for any of my pupils to become intimate with Mr. Ainger - of course it is a difficult thing to prove a man's motive."¹

This time Lord Scarsdale forbade the visit. Ainger had offered to take Curzon for a holiday to London without first taking his housemaster's permission. Curzon grumbled at not being allowed to go: "I imagine that my tutor wrote and dissuaded you for giving me permission... I cannot see what Tutor has found to complain in it, unless it be his foolish jealousy at seeing any other master having anything to do with his pupils, which was the primary cause of the disturbance about Browning a year or two ago."² But Lord Scarsdale proved to be surprisingly adamant.

To return to "the disturbance about Browning", as Curzon put it. Browning had drawn young Curzon to his fold sending him the Prince Consort papers at the end of 1872. In the summer term of that year Curzon having been struck in the eye by a cricket ball found himself spending considerable time with Browning. Wolley Dod complained to Browning:

I strongly object to your taking Curzon out for drives without taking leave from me or the Head Master, to your writing to him by post, which you have done several times, when he is only two doors off, and most of all to your doing his verses for him, as I have suspected several times, and as he admits in the case of his iambics this week. I think the whole case is one which justifies an appeal to the Head Master, and I have accordingly made one, specifying the points on which your dealings with

¹ Dod to Lord Scarsdale, Feb.24, 1876, CA. 272.

² Curzon to Lord Scarsdale, Feb.25, 1876, CA. 266/1-3

Curzon seem to me objectionable.¹

Browning's excuse that he was preserving Curzon from dangers of Wolley Dod's establishment did not help matters. Hornby was appealed to, to chastise Browning. Hornby called Browning and accosted him with, "I hear Mr. Wolley Dod has a good-looking pupil." Browning had angrily retorted, "Do you mean to say that you have allowed any master to tell you I took notice of a boy because he was good-looking?" Hornby's bland reply had been, "I don't know, I am sure."²

Wayte, another master, told Wolley Dod that he thought the relationship between Browning and Curzon to be a case of 'spooning'. Wolley Dod wrote to Browning saying that instead of improving, Curzon had "lately become querulous and spoilt in manner" from his associations with Browning.³

Dr. Hornby, taking up cudgels for Dod wrote,

I want only to say first that in speaking of Curzon as an attractive boy I did not wish to impute any motives to you, only to point out that in a public school appearances must be taken into account, and that, independent of a tutor's expressed wish, there is good reason why such an intimacy as seems to have arisen between you and Curzon should not continue.

I think I ought to say that the habit which if I am not mistaken you have formed of entering into very confidential talks with many boys (not your pupils) about the character and conduct of their schoolfellows, seems to me to be a very dangerous one and to do great harm without really effecting anything

¹ Wortham, op.cit. p.101.

² Ibid, p.102.

³ Ibid, p.103.

for what, I believe, you have as your object in such intercourse, the eradication or diminution of gross vice in the school.

The intimacy between Browning and Curzon, however, continued braving the storm of Hornby's and Dod's displeasure. Surprisingly Lord Scarsdale had come to his son's rescue and gone to the extent of writing to Browning exonerating him of having anything but the purest motives in looking after his son. Lord Scarsdale said,

Exceedingly regret this extremely unpleasant complaint from Mr. Wolley Dod's with reference to your conduct towards my son George. I am fully aware of your warm feelings and keen desire that he should grow up a manly, true and pure-minded lad, and though it is possible that your notice of him may have served to annoy his Tutor, I give you full credit for acting from the purest motives, & I do not wish the kindly relations between you & my boy to fall through.²

The school, nevertheless, forbade the two to either meet or communicate. On July 20, 1874 Curzon wrote to Browning,

I cannot say how distressed I am that I am prevented from seeing you, all through the unkind and ungentlemanly and obstinate conduct of my tutor, whom I detest the more I see him. But I must thank you with my whole heart for all the inestimable good you have done me, for you have always been open to me as the best of counsellors, and you have warned me against evil companionship.³

Dr. Hornby did manage to sack Browning a year after

¹ Wortham, *op.cit.*, pp.103-4.

² Lord Scarsdale to Browning, July 14, 1874, CA.141.

³ Curzon to Browning, July 20, 1874, CA.141.

the scandal but the friendship did not cease. Curzon introduced Browning to his first wife Mary saying that he owed all that he was to Browning and also invited him to the Delhi Durbar in India.¹

The relationship between the two waxed and waned. It was Browning who took the initiative, stoking the fire when it burnt low. After the initial burst of anguish at being parted from a beloved tutor, the intensity of Curzon's feelings subsided to a humdrum level. They were not allowed to meet but they did correspond. It was Browning who took the initiative. He sent presents, wrote letters in violet ink and invited Curzon to Italy. Curzon replied to the Master affectionately but at fitful intervals. Most of the letters are apologetic at not having replied promptly. On August 6, 1874, Curzon writes from Kedleston, "I have been so oppressed by the cares of a bachelor's life that I have not been able to find time to write to you."² Browning promptly sends off two long letters and a volume of Tennyson.³

The new year begins with yet another apology from Curzon, "I am quite ashamed of myself for not answering your nice letter before..."⁴ In May, Curzon thanks Browning for "the very pretty pin you sent me by Graham" and says, "I am afraid

¹ Wortham, op.cit., p.300.

² Curzon to Browning, Aug.6,1874, CA. 141.

³ Ibid, Aug. 23, 1874.

⁴ Ibid, Jan.7, 1875.

I forgot to thank you for your nice letter from London... I have still another thing to thank you for viz. the last number of the Tennyson."¹

In February 1876 Curzon writes from Eton by apologising again for the delay in not having written earlier saying, "I have indeed been meaning to write to you for some time past but I am afraid I very frequently don't carry out my good intentions." The letter, however, ends on a warmer note. "I do miss you so much here, though I did not see very much of you for the last year or so, did I? Yet the place seems strange without you. I often wish you were back again if only for the pleasure of merely seeing you."²

A year after Browning's departure Wolley Dod was reporting with what seems like a sigh of relief to Lord Scarsdale about Curzon: "He has improved very much during the school times not only in work but in general conduct, as I hoped he would when older: his character, is becoming more manly."³

Curzon, however, had not given up his friend. In the winter of 1876, he asked his father, "The holidays begin on Friday the 15th. Do you object to my going from here to Cambridge to stay with Mr. Browning who now lives there till Monday..

¹ Curzon to Browning, May 5, 1875.

² Curzon to Browning, Feb. 15, 1876, OB.1/445.

³ Dod to Scarsdale, April 1, 1876, CA.272.

He is very anxious that I should go."¹ Lord Scarsdale not merely allowed Curzon to visit Browning at Cambridge but also wrote to thank the tutor: "My son much enjoyed his visit at Cambridge."²

The indulgent Lord Scarsdale even sanctioned a trip to Europe with Oscar Browning. He also wrote to the Master saying he was, "... anxious for a chat with you as to the projected trip abroad with George after Christmas, which I am quite disposed to sanction."³ Upon their return, Lord Scarsdale penned a letter of thanks "to express my gratitude for all your kindness and attention to George during your recent trip. He tells me how much he appreciated your unvarying good nature towards him. I quite believe that your influence will have benefited him materially. I expect him to steer clear of all vice and contamination at Oxford and I have little fear of it..."⁴

Eight years later when Lord Scarsdale's younger son Frank applied to go to Europe with Browning, the father was not so forthcoming. While giving sanction, he grumbled about the costs. With eldest son George no such consideration had stood in the way. Curzon was definitely the father's favourite and there was little that Lord Scarsdale could deny him. About Frank, Lord Scarsdale wrote grudgingly to Browning, "I don't in the

¹ Curzon to Lord Scarsdale, Dec. 5, 1876, CA.266/1.

² Lord Scarsdale to Browning, Dec.26, 1876, OB.1/437.

³ Lord Scarsdale to Browning, Nov.18, 1877, OB.1/437.

⁴ Lord Scarsdale to Browning, Jan. 1878, OB. 1/437.

least object to his going and am pleased he should have a friend of such experience as yourself as his chaperon... but, as you know these outings cost money & youngmen don't always consider that!"¹

Curzon was certainly the apple of his father's eye. Lord Scarsdale even corresponded with Browning about Curzon's University education calling it, "a serious and difficult question." He proudly informed the tutor, "you rejoice at his recent success - P.C. Italian prize! it did not altogether surprise me, knowing his capacity."²

Upon returning from the European tour, Curzon sat down to write a long letter to Browning.

I have felt how good and just an influence yours has been upon me during the last 3 months... Either the force of your own true example or the teaching of your own pure doctrine, has given me I feel it, a seriousness I very much lacked before & which I very much need if ever I am to do anything in the world. The existence of this new feeling in me has been brought before me by events connected with this house which have occurred since my return - I heard evil things about it and undoubtedly true ones and I know the quick straight line I have taken would satisfy you. I recognise, more fully than I ever did before... the enormous responsibility that rests on the Captain of a House and I see that while mechanical duties of such a post have met with their due attention at my hands, there are other and more ³serious obligations of which I have not taken note.

¹ Lord Scarsdale to Browning, July 22, 1886, OB. 1/437.

² Ibid, Dec.26, 1876.

³ Curzon to Browning, Feb. 2, 1878, OB.1/445.

Thanking the master for a pencil-case, Curzon went on to add,

Your letter was such a delight to me. We were very great friends before our tour - but if I may say so, we are still greater now; and the absence from your society short though it has been has shown me how much I value it. It was a cruel contrast exchanging your genial confidence for the dissatisfied and suspecting reception accorded to me by Stone: [his new tutor] and I am afraid I don't like the man. The masters here are full of inquisitiveness about our tour and beset me with questions.¹

Thus the relationship of Curzon with Browning is seen to be characterized by intense but fitful feeling. There is a definite overtone of passion in Curzon's anguish at the Headmaster's decree that the two must not meet. Curzon had then ranted at Hornby: "he cannot know how much he is doing by separating you from me."²

Curzon is known to have betrayed no homosexual tendency in adult life. The question then is whether there was any homosexual strain during the early years. Psychoanalysts maintain that the sexual instinct, first appearing at puberty is undifferentiated and not directed to a specific sexual object or centered in sexual organs. Sexual feeling at this stage being undecisive and undifferentiated often turns inverse. Therefore it is maintained that homosexual tendency is very frequent in normal children whose later development is heterosexual. Freud says, "I have never carried through any psychoanalysis of a man or a woman without discovering a very

¹ Curzon to Browning, Feb.2, 1878, OB.1/445.

² Ibid, July 14, 1874, CA.141.

significant homosexual tendency."¹

There are the radical inverts but most boys coming from sheltered background and entering public schools are innocent and ignorant and are tempted to do things or yield to seduction out of curiosity and an undefined pleasurable feeling. Much of the pleasure is also derived from the knowledge that what they seek is forbidden fruit and secrecy and risk add to the excitement. These schoolboy passions arise in the evolution of sexual emotions but in most cases, as the boy leaves school and mixes with members of the opposite sex, the impulse turns to the normal direction.

Max Dessoir says, "an undifferentiated sexual feeling is normal, on the average, during the first years of puberty, i.e., from 13 to 15 in boys and from 12 to 14 in girls - while in later years it must be regarded as pathological." He maintains that at this stage the sexual organs and the intense and idealized passions of boys and girls have hardly a physical side, a fact often overlooked by grown-ups.²

Ellis lists three causes as being the exciting motivations to inversion - examples at school, seduction and disappointments in normal love, all of them tending to draw the subject away from the opposite sex.³ The school system with its segregation of the sexes during puberty and adolescence is an ideal ground for breeding of intimacy between students of the same sex and

¹ Freud as quoted by Havelock Ellis, Studies in the Psychology of Sex, 2 Vols., (New York, 1942), Vol. I Part IV, pp.80-1.

² Max Dessoir, as quoted by Ellis, op.cit., Vol. I, Part IV, p.79.

³ Ellis, op.cit., Vol. I. Part IV, p.324.

sprouting of intense friendships, often platonic but with a marked emotional sexuality beneath it.

Whether Browning made an overture to Curzon with a calculated attempt at seeking sexual gratification and whether he succeeded in it is a point that is not easy to establish. Browning confesses to having been very impressed by Curzon. Curzon too may have offered some sort of voluntary or involuntary invitation. Otherwise the strong attachment between the two could never have been established or sustained.

What undoubtedly existed between the two is a 'flame' relationship as described by Obici and Marchesini in their study of school-friendships of girls.¹ These devotions, on the borderline between friendship and sexual passion, are found in all countries where sexes are segregated for educational purposes. The attraction of the forbidden and distant fruit produces tendencies and habits which can scarcely develop in freedom. Attraction is greatly heightened by the obstacles that stand in the way. A sentiment which under other conditions would have scarcely gone beyond ordinary attraction thus probably became a 'flame' where Curzon was concerned.

Under these influences boys and girls feel the purest and simplest sentiments in a hyperesthetic manner. The girls here studied have lost an exact conception of the simplest manifestation of friendship, and think they are giving evidence of exquisite sensibility and true friendship by loving a companion to madness; friendship in them has become a passion.²

¹ Obici and Marchesini, discussed by Ellis, Op.cit., Vol.I, Part IV, pp.368-84.

² Ellis, Op.cit., Vol. I, Part IV, p.374.

It is necessary to remember that the relationship between Browning and Curzon was not one of a teacher and pupil but more as a friendship between kindred souls.

While there is an unquestionable sexual element in the 'flame' relationship, this cannot be regarded as an absolute expression of real congenital perversion of the sex-instinct. The frequency of the phenomena, as well as the fact that, on leaving college to enter social life, the girl usually ceases to feel these emotions, are sufficient to show the absence of congenital abnormality.¹

Occasionally what begins as a 'flame' or a 'rave' will turn into a sensible firm friendship, which is possibly what happened in the case of Browning and Curzon. Though a majority of these 'flames', 'raves' and 'crushes' have a sexual basis, in the majority of people in whom these occur this is not recognised. This is demonstrated by the fact that Lord Scarsdale saw no harm in allowing the friendship to continue. Curzon himself, strangely enough, seems to have never suspected the Master of having homosexual leanings. He said fondly to the Master, "you would have plunged headlong in... the Sea of Galilee and come out pure and sweet."² On another occasion when the Master was on vacation, Curzon inquired with playful daring, "are any of the same young ladies at your hostel... Do you dance?"³ Surely Curzon would not have made a reference to the ladies had he known Browning to be a homosexual.

This is not to say that Curzon was unaware of overt

¹ Ellis, Op.cit., Vol. I, Part IV, p.374.

² Curzon to Browning, May 12, 1883, OB.1/447.

³ Ibid Jan. 3, 1879, OB.1/446.

homosexual practice. Once on a trip to Europe he came across an instance and warned his friend Farrer:

A few remarks about Greece before I came to Egypt. Don't give anyone else recommendations to Hadgi Lazare. He turns out to be a g-gg-a. Thanks heaven I don't say so from personal experience though he did once look into my bedroom. But I found it at Corfu where he is well known and where I heard all about it from Admiral Baird.¹

Nor was he unaware of the dangers of such a friendship. He writes to the same friend about ".going to a dance every night (excluding Saturdays and Sundays) but one". He adds,

But it is not so much to them that I point - as the principal sources of enjoyment as to the opportunities which seem to multiply year after year of strengthening old friendship and acquiring new... some of these insensibly develop into real affection: real but not dangerous.²

The last word is crucial for it shows Curzon's awareness of the hazards of friendship.

Moreover, Curzon nearly got himself engaged to be married when he was only 20 years old and still at Oxford. He seems to have confided to Brodrick about his narrow escape for Brodrick wrote back saying, "You have more to beware than most from the danger of such entanglements."³ Curzon was clearly very attractive to women. So were women attractive to him: "At Perth, the women have figures that make one stare

¹ Curzon to Farrer, Jan. 29, 1883, CA.140.

² Ibid.

³ Brodrick to Curzon, Nov.23, 1879, CP.Vol.9.

and itch" - he wrote to a friend while touring the Levant.¹

Twelve years after the controversy, when Curzon made his maiden speech, Browning was moved to writing to Headmaster Hornby going once more over the events that caused him, as he said, "some of the acutest pain." Hornby's cryptic reply was, "I am sorry to say that your letter does not mend matters. George Curzon, is, I think, a much stronger man than you imagine."² Obviously even Hornby did not suspect Curzon of having fallen prey to Browning.

Curzon seems to have been attracted to Browning because "he is the pleasantest of companions admirably informed on all subjects".³ Curzon is no doubt flattered because Browning takes every possible opportunity to show how much he likes Curzon. Curzon's friend Cecil Spring-Rice once wrote from Balliol, "O.B. was here for the Palmerston dinner and sat by me and talked about you."⁴ Curzon's vanity was his greatest weakness. It needed to be constantly fed. There was also a vicarious thrill in defying the Headmaster and associating with Browning.

¹ Curzon to Farrer, May 27, 1883, CA.140.

² Wortham, Op.cit., pp.154-5.

³ Curzon to Farrer, Oct. 17, 1880, CA.140.

⁴ Spring-Rice to Curzon, March, 1878, CA.263.
Sir Cecil Spring-Rice (1889-1918).