

EPILOGUE AND CONCLUSIONS

In the last twenty years of his life George Nathaniel Curzon seemed to be carrying to logical conclusion the influences of his infancy. He became, as it were, a victim of his delusions, wallowing in self-pity and taking a sort of masochistic satisfaction in believing all the world was against him. The heat and dust and disappointments in India had begun to take their toll.

Ill-luck dogged him on his return from India. In July 1906 Mary succumbed to her illness. She had rejoined her husband in India against the doctor's orders, and in her death Curzon felt he had lost the anchor of his life. He went to Kedleston with his three infant daughters, telling a friend "I am not fit for society and desire only to hide my head."¹

He remained in political wilderness until 1908 when he finally got his earldom and reentered Parliament. Nevertheless there had been stoic pleasure in believing that the world had abandoned him. "Indeed I began to feel a sort of gloomy pride in my undistinguished distinction," Curzon wrote. In the Coalition Government of 1915 he was Lord

¹ Source references are not made for this part of the thesis which is beyond my purview.

Privy Seal. When Asquith's Government fell in the next year, he became one of the four ministers in Lloyd George's War Cabinet.

Simultaneously, he announced his engagement to a wealthy American widow, Grace Duggan, breaking off with an unkind blow an eight-year liaison with the famous actress-novelist Elinor Glyn. He had met the lovely red-headed Mrs. Glyn two years after Mary's death. In fairness to Curzon, he had made it abundantly clear that marriage was not on the cards but Elinor Glyn had dared to hope. In fact she was living in his country-house at Montecute in Somerset when upon opening the paper to read about Curzon's appointment in Lloyd George's Cabinet, she learnt of his engagement to Grace. Shattered and disillusioned she burnt the five hundred letters Curzon was said to have written to her. He married Grace in early 1917, daughter of Joseph Hinds, formerly United States Minister in Brazil and a widow of the Brazilian millionaire Alfred Duggan of Buenos Aires.

In 1919, Curzon succeeded Balfour and remained Britain's Foreign Minister during the crucial post-war years. As Curzon's wife, Grace was catapulted into becoming one of the leading social hostesses of the land, a position which she had coveted and thoroughly enjoyed. In his second marriage, however, it was Curzon who was to get wounded, for Grace was not the adoring, uncomplaining wife that Curzon had had in Mary. Grace was happy so long as she was going to parties, entertaining or basking in attention. When due to overwork or ill-health

Curzon was not able to tend to her, she found wilful ways of punishing him. She was never there when her husband was in pain or in need. He begged her to go with him to Kedleston, for Lord Scarsdale had died and Curzon came into inheritance: "All ask for Gracie and want to see the beautiful lady." He hopefully wrote to her, "One day you will take up your duties as Chatelaine of this place," even though Grace had cruelly told him, "I would so much rather not go at all - after all one's home is where one's heart is". He was often very ill. "The Danish doctor, Knutsen came this morning and I inquired exactly what I had in my leg and the reply was thrombosis, phlebitis and lymphangitis." But Grace, busy as she was leading her own separate life as society hostess, did not come. Yet he could not stop himself from writing pathetic letters saying, "You do not take the slightest interest in what I say or do". There seems to have been considerable justification in Kitchener's statement, "There is only one thing that Curzon likes more than hurting others and that is to persuade others to humiliate him."

In Bonar Law's Cabinet Curzon was ostensible deputy; in fact in the Prime Minister's absence, it was Curzon who presided over Cabinet meetings. Besides, such was his success at the Lausanne Conference in 1922 that he had every expectation of succeeding Bonar Law when he resigned in May 1923.

Nevertheless when the crucial issue was to be decided, Curzon chose to go to Montecute House in Somerset where

there was no telephone in the house. Like a grand Roman proconsul he expected to receive a message from the King asking him to return to London to take the high office which he felt was his. The message had come but it was to tell him that Stanley Baldwin had been chosen instead. Intrigue may have contributed to Curzon's defeat. But his own blind folly in arrogantly believing that he was a superior man above the need for canvassing support did its own damage.

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I had begun my research attributing Curzon's arrogant and autocratic temperament to a brutalized and diminished childhood. I had taken the 'superior-person' image as a mask cloaking a lonely insecure child beneath. There was reason why I had thought so.

Studies of the psyche show that infants develop their ego identities according to the comfort and well-being provided by the mother in early infancy. If she can fill his little world with a sense of well-being and contentment, he grows up with a feeling of trust and confidence. It is the recurring and unfailing reassurance from the mother that teaches the child to develop, as he grows, trust in the outside world and also a corresponding trust in his own self and his own organs to cope with himself.

Early biographers of Curzon write as if Curzon was

deprived of this maternal reassurances. Blanche has been made to appear as a mother who was indifferent, if not harsh. To add to the damage, she seems to have given blind control of her child to a brutal and vindictive governess. Generally children suffering from maternal neglect often turn to their nurses or governesses for the loving care denied to them. Winston Churchill had the soothing arms of Mrs. Everest to cuddle him. Alas! Curzon seems to have been flung into the jaws of a demoness. That a child's psyche should be permanently damaged under the circumstance, there can be no doubt. Lord Scarsdale too had been made out to be a coldly austere father who was unable to communicate any love and pride he might have felt for his son. It was logical therefore for me to conclude that Curzon's increasingly authoritarian behaviour in adult life stemmed from the ego-shattering exercises he had been subjected to in childhood. In his childhood he had been humbled and humiliated. Therefore when he reached a position of command he was not going to let others win. The obsession to masquerade as a 'superior person' seemed a desperate bid to attract and capture the attention which was never forthcoming when desperately needed in childhood. This was the premise upon which I began.

But to my surprise, digging up the Curzon archives in England, I came across fresh and obviously unused evidence to show that the Scarsdale parents were in no way indifferent

to their children and certainly not to Curzon. On the contrary, from the moment of his birth, they lavished him with attention and care. Lord Scarsdale may have imposed pecuniary restraints but they can in no way be called harsh. In fact, as the early letters show, the parents can be said to have spoilt their first son.

Among the recently acquired Curzon Additional Papers at the India Office Library, I came across a 15-page handwritten note by Blanche Scarsdale entitled About my second confinement when Baby George was born. It makes nonsense of any theory that she was not intensely concerned with her eldest son. A curious, moving document, it is literally an hour-to-hour account of Curzon's birth and the few days thereafter. What comes as a pleasant surprise is that in an age of wet nurses, Blanche Scarsdale breast-fed her son and that her husband allowed her to do so.

Blanche's 15-page note is not the only testimony of her love for her son. Her subsequent action and behaviour show that she was deeply involved with him. When Curzon went to his first prep school at Wixenford, it was Blanche who took him there. She sent him hampers of goodies and even selected presents for his friends. He confided to her every secret, telling her how homesick he was after her departure and how the headmaster's greedy wife helped herself to the goodies from his hamper. He was not afraid to tell her that he had broken his watch and only asked if he should send it for repairs.

Blanche may not have visited her son at Eton, a point used by a biographer to demonstrate her neglect of him. But she had her eleventh child in 1873, the year of his going up there, and she was to die two years later. Nevertheless this did not diminish keen interest in his affairs. She helped him decorate his study selecting Derby China for his mantelpiece. When he wished to buy a new writing table, it was Blanche who persuaded her husband to pay towards the expense. She also pleaded on her son's behalf and got him his new Eton jacket.

Blanche exulted in her son's achievements. When Curzon got the Prince Consort French Prize Blanche in her ignorance hoped the Queen would send for the boys. Her letter written to him on the occasion shows that not merely did she follow his academic career with interest but even remembered in detail the progress of his classmates. Blanche died while Curzon was still at Eton but in his subsequent actions we see him striving to meet, as it were, her approval and applause. She had set very high standards for him. She was for him, as he has written on one of her surviving letters, "very, very precious."

Neither is Lord Scarsdale the austere cleric biographers have made him out to be. Though he features passively in his son's early years, he blossoms into a friend and a confidant after his wife's death. At every turning point of his life Curzon turns to his father for approval, assurance, commiseration or congratulation and Lord Scarsdale does not seem to fail him.

Lord Scarsdale may have warned his son against the sins

of vanity and grudged him a new jacket at Eton. But he was hardly as tight-fisted as he has been suspected to be. Gladstone is reported to have been aghast at the luxury of the furnishings in Curzon's room at Eton. In fact Lord Scarsdale seems to have positively pampered and spoilt his son. When House Master Wolley Dod complained of Curzon's dare-devil behaviour in class, Lord Scarsdale turned a deaf ear. Even when Dod accused Curzon of cheating, the father seemed to have paid scant attention. Astonishingly Lord Scarsdale, braving the Headmaster's displeasure, allowed Curzon's friendship with the suspected homosexual Oscar Browning continue. But what is more surprising is Curzon's boast that his father would allow him to do so.

Lord Scarsdale, like his wife, had high expectations of his eldest son and Curzon strove to meet them. When he failed to get a First at Oxford he made a desperate bid to compensate by winning the Lothian prize. Biographer Mosley says Curzon was nervous about breaking the news of his impending nuptials to his father, which he takes as indicative of a defective parent-son relationship. I have a different interpretation. Curzon was then 36 and an Under-Secretary of State and did not really require parental consent. But because the two were very dear to him it was important for him that his father should like Mary just as it was important for him that Mary should like his father. Once when after their marriage Mary complained of neglect by the Scarsdales,

Curzon rushed to his father's defence declaring, "I am sure my father is incapable of intentional neglect".

It was therefore not parental deprivation but overmuch attention from his parents which had unwholesome consequences for Curzon. He was conscious as he grew up that he had to at all times live up to the expectations reposed in him; he had to bring home the spoils of great victories which everybody attributed to him. Thus a vicious cycle grew, goading him to cut corners.

In order to maintain the high expectation of academic excellence Curzon even resorted to cheating at Eton. With his brilliant academic record, he had little need to copy but this only goes to show that he was determined not to take chances. It was not dissimilar to the trait that he pursued in India - not for an instance to let the vigour of the government relax. The means used may not be above board but were sanctified by the imperialist end. Surveying the Indian scene at the commencement of his Viceroyalty, Curzon had little doubt about the permanence of British rule in India. In fact he loftily wrote back home to say that at the Lucknow session of the Congress the speakers had "spent the greater part of their time in complimenting me!" Nevertheless, he was not going to take chances and did things which hastened the end of the Raj.

What ruined Curzon was that he had in his growing-up years received a surfeit of attention and adulation. His parents,

friends and teachers had admired his looks and ability and treated him as a great personage and he had tried his best to live up to the reputation. From India Mary had written to her parents proudly declaring her husband was "treated exactly like a reigning sovereign... the only difference is that he has a great deal more power than most kings..." Very soon Curzon had begun demonstrating in India that it was so.

Curzon's admiring coterie of friends had done their own bit to swell his ego. He was only in his second year at Eton, when senior scholar and athlete, Edward Lyttelton had written to him asking him for his photograph. Brodrick lost no opportunity in telling him "how high I rated the promise of your life as well as our friendship," adding "You are universally marked out for high office". Margot Asquith said adoringly, "It was delicious seeing you...". Oscar Browning could not stop singing Curzon's praises. It was probably this attention, more than anything else, that flattered Curzon's ego and kept him close to the homosexual Master. Evidence shows that what Curzon felt for Browning was more like a schoolgirl's crush, a devotion on the borderline between friendship and sexual passion, which psychiatrists feel is not uncommon in places where sexes are segregated for educational purposes. Curzon's vanity being a great weakness, he probably got a vicarious thrill from defying the Headmaster and associating with Browning who made every attempt to show how

much he cared for the boy.

Despite his spinal injury which forced him to be strapped up in a leather and steel harness for the waking hours of his life, Curzon insisted on taking on a strenuous workload. He undertook long and hazardous journeys to remote outposts, trying to prove that an injured Curzon was capable of venturing where even healthy rarely dare to tread. The expiatory physical suffering and self-denial seemed to give him a sort of a stoic satisfaction. He could look around the world and feel how superior he was.

A vague and unpronounced form of sado-masochistic tendency, which is not tantamount to a sexual perversion, may have been a legacy of the spinal injury received in adolescence. Thus for five years before their marriage, Curzon tantalized Mary. Even after getting engaged, he insisted on the engagement remaining a secret. But while binding Mary, he continued his philandering ways. After all he had been taught to believe he was a superman. Mary's uncomplaining acceptance of his outrageous behaviour seemed only to confirm that image. In his relations with Grace, however, Curzon seemed to almost deliberately lay himself open to humiliations. In fact he gave the impression that he invited them.

In India Curzon worked like a slave. He chided his subordinates for apathy and sloth, taking on the workload on his own shoulders. When Brodrick warned, "I gather you

that not one of us ever mustered up the courage to go upstairs and tell our father or mother". If this was true, the Scarsdale parents must be equally blamed for allowing such horror to be perpetrated in their nursery. They must then be cold, indifferent, uncaring people they have been made out to be. Neither in words nor deeds did they neglect or ignore their children.

The Scarsdale parents rewarded Miss Paraman for what they thought was loyal service to the family. Blanche Scarsdale left a gold necklace in her will to the governess. It could be argued that Miss Paraman may have been a schizophrenic Dr. Jeckyll-Mr. Hyde personality, presenting a beatific demeanour to the parents and a demonic one to the children and Blanche Scarsdale may not have known of her brutality in the nursery. But had that been the case, the ten-year-old Curzon emerging from the nursery would surely be a tormented soul. What we have instead is a happy and relaxed boy. He makes demands upon his parents confident that they will be met.

There are other questions. Why did Curzon in later years disparage his father's role in his life? Lord Riddell has recorded Curzon telling him that "My old father had no sympathy for my aspirations". Yet we know this was not true. Lord Scarsdale had proudly sent off Curzon's letter written on his early travels to Prime

The psycho-historical approach tries to understand them. Such a study provides no absolute answers. It can only attempt to explain. This is what I have done.