

CHAPTER III

The Scarsdale Parents

Over the years an impression has been built that Curzon's parents were callously indifferent to him. His mother Lady Blanche Scarsdale has been particularly singled out for her rejection of her son. Biographer Leonard Mosley says of Blanche:

When she was shown her son and heir for the first time, she...looked at her top-heavy offspring with the cold surprise that was to be the quality of her attitude towards her son for the rest of her life. She handed him back to his wet-nurse and asked that he should be brought back for further inspection the following morning. That was to be the pattern in years to come... As he grew older, and began to yearn for the affection which his nature increasingly needed, George Nathaniel Curzon became slowly aware that beneath the surface of his mother's attitude towards him was so detached as to be almost indifferent.¹

Kenneth Rose is much less harsh but he too does not

¹ Leonard Mosley, Curzon, the End of an Epoch (London, 1960), p.2.

absolve Blanche of her disregard to her son:

Lady Scarsdale...kept a diary during succeeding years. It contains details of family comings and goings, the weather, texts of sermons, the clothes she wore each day and successive winners of the Derby. But there is nothing of her intimate thoughts, not a word to suggest that her children ever caused her anxiety or brought her pride. She remains an elusive figure.¹

Curzon has added to the impression by implying that his father did not share in his ambitions and took little interest in his career. To friend Lord Riddell Curzon said, "My old father... had no sympathy with my aspirations. I don't believe that my father ever read one of my books or speeches, and he took very little interest in any success I achieved."² Curzon was, he liked to call himself, a self-made man, implying that he had achieved his success despite the handicaps put in his way.

In the pencilled notes written for his biographer, Curzon, perhaps subconsciously, added to the myth when he talked about the indignities heaped upon the Scarsdale children in the nursery by a brutal and vindictive governess.³ Curzon remembered his governess uncharitably: "She persecuted us 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."⁴

¹ Kenneth Rose, Superior Person(London, 1969), p.18.

² Lord Riddell, Lord Riddell's Intimate Diary of the Peace Conference and After, 1918-23 (London, 1933), p.184.

³ Notes on Early Life, CA.20.

⁴ Ibid.

This leads the reader to believe, however inadvertantly, that the parents did not care to know what was happening to their children in their own home and therefore must take equal blame. If parental deprivation had occurred and had been followed by, as Curzon's 'Notes' give us to understand, years of sadistic tyranny under a governess, the development of an infantile trauma could not be ruled out. It would not be unnatural for the psyche of a child to be permanently damaged if when at a stage it was desperately looking for a parental figure, it should be thrust into the arms of a witch like Miss Paraman. This, coming on the heels of a parental disregard, could not but cause permanent damage.

All this had initially led me to trace Curzon's increasingly authoritarian behaviour in adult life to the ego-shattering exercise he had been subjected to in childhood. The compulsive determination to have his own way probably, it seemed, stemmed from those childhood tussles when the authority in command had won out while he had been left mangled and bruised. I concluded that this was why when Curzon reached a position of command, he was determined not to let others win. The obsession to masquerade as a superior person seemed but a desperate bid to attract and capture attention which was never forthcoming when desperately needed in childhood.

But to my surprise, I came across evidence to show that the Scarsdale parents were in no way indifferent to their children and certainly not to their eldest son and pride. On the contrary from the moment of his birth, they lavished him with attention and care. Among the recently acquired Curzon

Additional Papers at the India Office Library, I came across a 15-page hand-written paper by Blanche Scarsdale which makes nonsense of any theory that she was not intensely concerned with her eldest son. A curious, moving document, it is an hour-by-hour account of Curzon's birth and the couple of days thereafter. It records the castor oil taken to induce the pain, the birth-pangs as they came, the consternation at the thought of the baby's arrival before the doctor or the midwife could reach and the young father's concern that his elder two-year old daughter should not be forgotten in the excitement.¹

What comes as a pleasant surprise is that Blanche Scarsdale breast-fed her son and that her husband allowed her to do so. "No fullness at all in my breasts yet," she complains at first. "I only feel the drawing throbbing pain, when baby suck[s] but this leaves off by Friday - and I begin to wear my metal nipple shields."² Upper-class mid-19th century wives having turned household management to stewards and housekeepers had little occupation apart from novel reading, theatres, card-playing and formal visits. They rarely breast-fed their children and husbands discouraged them to do so fearing that it might spoil their wives' figures. In 1792, Mary Wollstonecraft had cited the desire for sex by the father as the main reason for survival of wet-nursing: "There are many husbands so devoid of sense and parental affection that, during the first effervescence of voluptuous fondness, they refuse to let their wives suckle their

¹ Blanche Scarsdale, About My Second Confinement when Baby George was Born, 1959. (A hand-written 15-page document).CA.190.

² Ibid.

children."¹

In fact propaganda against wet nurses had begun way back in the early 17th century when influential Puritan writers on household management like Perkins, Cleaves and Dod had advised mothers to feed their children arguing that nature had provided breasts for feeding. In the early eighteenth century, the propaganda in favour of mothers nursing their own children had been powerfully reinforced by a fierce attack in newspapers on the practice of handing children over to the slovenly and dirty wet-nurses. Instances were cited of the Duchess of Devonshire feeding her eldest son for nine months. In 1748 Dr. William Cadogan published his widely read Essay Upon Nursing and the Management of Children. He demonstrated that ninety per cent of children died who were reared on pap and fed by lazy wet-nurses with poor or contaminated milk supply.² Nevertheless the institution of wet-nursing not merely survived but also flourished. As we know, at the turn of the century, Curzon's wife Mary took out a wet-nurse to India for her second daughter. "Cynthia is so beautiful and angelic and the wet-nurse flourished, so all is well", Mary reported in her Journal.

¹ Lawrence Stone, The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800 (Penguin Books, 1979), p.270.

² Ibid, pp.270-2. Also see Jonathan Gathorne-Hardy, The Rise and Fall of the British Nanny (London, 1972) pp.33-57.

³ Mary Curzon, Journal (in India), Feb.1, 1899. MCP.

George was born at eleven in the morning before the doctor would reach, Blanche has recorded in her paper. Her own mother was present at the child-birth. After the baby's delivery, the young father was persuaded by Blanche to go to a meeting of the Diocesan Church' in Derby but on his way back he thoughtfully stopped to buy a doll for his elder child, the two-year-old Sophy, so that she did not feel neglected in the excitement of the arrival of a brother. Blanche records with shy pride that at Kedleston, "Bells rang on...our little son and heir's birth". She notices that "His face is very red and little head so hollow on each side, mostly on one - so very queer - plenty of space for filling out into a big pate!" The baby is brought every few hours for his feed, "smiling so sweet and so dear...in his Blackbourne lace cap which just fits him." Once when the baby cries a great deal because of a stomach upset, she blames herself saying,"afraid it is because of my plum eating last night."¹

George was a fair baby with curly thick brown hair, clear brown eyes and an abnormally large head. In later life Curzon would recall that because of the large size of his head, "It was considered unsafe to leave me anywhere near the top of a staircase because on one occasion I was overbalanced by the momentum of that article and rolled down from top to bottom."² Nevertheless he must have been an exceptionally handsome child. As he grew older, his mother fancying him as another little Lord Fauntleroy, took him on regular trips to London to have him fitted in velvet

¹ Blanche Scarsdale, Note, op.cit.

² Notes on Early Life, CA.20.

suits at the fashionable Swears and Wells tailors.¹ She also had his hair grown long. Curzon wrote in his memoirs, "My hair was kept in corkscrew ringlets brushed round the finger with a hairbrush, and falling upon the shoulders. I remember I cried very bitterly when it was cut off."² The mother preserved these locks.³

There is a miniature portrait of Curzon in long corkscrew curls wearing a white muslin dress.⁴ A sealskin waistcoat worn by Curzon as a child was also preserved and later given by Lord Scarsdale to Mary after they were married.⁵ Notable among the collection is a letter written by one-year old baby Curzon to his aunt Mary Senhouse upon her engagement.⁶

Of Lord Scarsdale, Leonard Mosley says, "For him the three great rewards of his life were, in order of importance, his peerage and the ancestry behind it, the pulpit of Kedleston Church from which he preached his weekly sermon, and his wife. He loved them all in diminishing stages, and these, together with his relentless pursuit of the rich game in his parklands, did not leave him much time for his eldest son or the children who followed."⁷

¹ Reminiscences by Curzon of his Early Life, CA.75.

² Ibid.

³ Momentoes of Curzon's Early Childhood, CA.490/91.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Letters from Curzon to Members of his Family, CA.192.

⁷ Mosley, op.cit. p.4.

Curzon's first wife Mary added to the impression calling her father-in-law "the most tyrannical old man I have ever seen, besides being the most eccentric." She elaborated, "He could not tolerate having any friend of his son stay in the house. He could not endure a minute's unpunctuality. Nobody dare lift a spoon without his permission. He viewed with displeasure any scheme for modernising the house, unwilling to admit that it would one day pass to his son." According to Mary, he scolded his daughters for not being married but then he never allowed a young man to enter the house. "He is an old despot of the 13th century," she said.¹

Mary was not being fair. Lord Scarsdale did not discourage his son's friends from coming to stay at Kedleston, the most frequent among them being the controversial Eton tutor Oscar Browning² and St. John Brodrick.³ Curzon wrote to Browning. "We have some people in the house for balls on Tuesday and Wednesday" and asked him to join them.⁴

Nor were the Scarsdale daughters neglected. Records show balls being organised to bring them out. "Last night I was at a most enjoyable dance in Nottinghamshire," Curzon wrote, "It was

¹ Nigel Nicolson, Mary Curzon (London, 1977), pp.85-6.

² Oscar Browning(1837-1923), Eton Housemaster in Curzon's time. Sacked by Headmaster Hornby in 1875 and resumed fellowship at King's Cambridge in 1878-9.

³ St. John Brodrick(1856-1942), later 1st Earl of, and 9th Viscount, Midleton. First met Curzon at Eton in 1874. Stepped into Curzon's position as Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs from 1898-1900; was Secretary of State for India 1903-5.

⁴ Curzon to Browning, Jan.4, 1880, OB.1/446.

my sister's debut."¹ Besides when Curzon first brought his bride home to Kedleston in 1895, Lord Scarsdale welcomed her in the lavish manner befitting a future lady of the manor.

No doubt, Lord Scarsdale was a stern cleric, a god-fearing man given to parsimoniousness. Photographs show him to be a thin, tall man with a severe-looking and narrow face. A shy man, he was not able to easily demonstrate his feelings. To understand him better, one must understand the prevailing Victorian child-parent relationship.

Lawrence Stone claims, "there seems to have been an uninterrupted connection between the caring but authoritarian discipline of the Puritan bourgeois parent of the 17th century and the caring but authoritarian discipline of the Evangelical bourgeois parent of the late 18th and early 19th centuries."² Both dogmas supported the idea of original sin: children were born with evil and it was the duty of parents to crush it out of the system with strict repression.

For greater discipline in maintaining the social order, Evangelism reaffirmed the father and the husband as the head of the household. The father was entrusted with control of the family unit, to initiate and maintain his own little tide of moral regeneration which consisted of demanding total obedience to his will and a ruthless crushing of the libido. He was to be not merely the secular but also the moral head of the household. He did his task dutifully but the internalized Victorian guilt-complex and soulsearching led to curious results in parent-child relationship. The child was subjected

¹ Curzon to Browning, Jan.11, 1877, OB.1/445.

² Stone, op.cit.,p.293. Also see Gathorne-Hardy, op.cit., pp.36-57.

to, on one hand, harsh coercion to authority which, paradoxically, was accompanied by an intense concern for his moral welfare. The dangers of vanity seem to have been a pet obsession with Lord Scarsdale. As a devoted and loving father, he could not however divest himself from his religious, duty-oriented outlook. On Curzon's receiving the Prince Consort French Prize, Lord Scarsdale noted, "Your success has given us all the greatest pleasure. You deserve credit I am sure will receive it, but do not, dear Boy, be unduly puffed up: at your comparatively early victories - your talents are given to you by Almighty God and I fervently pray you will ever use them rightly, and be a comfort and blessing to your parents,"¹

The pecuniary instincts, never far from the surface, come to the fore and he could not resist saying, "let us have all particulars, number of competitions. value of Prizes."² That Lord Scarsdale was extremely proud of Curzon is now not questioned. In 1887, Curzon on his first Grand Tour abroad wrote an account of the British mission in the Far East. Lord Scarsdale, like any proud father, sent the letter to Prime Minister Salisbury and among his papers there is the acknowledgement.³

Biographers like Mosley have maintained that Curzon held his father in awe and fear and was not able to enjoy a normal father-son relationship. The instance has been cited of how at the age of 36 and as an Under Secretary of the Government Curzon was nervous about breaking news of his planned nuptials to his father.

¹ Lord Scarsdale to Curzon, Dec.2, 1874, CA. 142.

² Ibid.

³ Salisbury to Lord Scarsdale, Nov.10, 1891, CA.270.
3rd Marquess of Salisbury (1830-1903) Three times Prime Minister of Britain.

His father on the contrary had received the news coolly: "So long as you love her and she loves you - that is all. You are not likely to make a mistake at your age, and she is old enough to know her own mind."¹ An overjoyed Curzon had rushed off and wrote to Mary like one for whom a great load and tension has been relieved. "I had to make none of the apologies or explanations or defences that you imagined," he is supposed to have said.²

Curzon's diffidence in this particular case was, however, not wholly unwarranted. In an age when parental consent was a vital prop to matrimony, he was marrying a foreigner and one with a Jewish-sounding name. Besides, so strong was the bond between father and son that Curzon felt he had to have his father's approval for all his decisions. Age-wise, as his father had pointed out, Curzon was a free citizen. Nevertheless he cared sufficiently to want to have his father's approval. He had shown his father Mary's photograph and was delighted when the old man said it was all "right and proper".³

A study of the Scarsdale parents and their relationship with their eldest son shows that Curzon had a very strong sustained relationship with both his parents in different phases of his life. In the earlier years it was the mother who aroused his adoration and after her death it was the father whose recognition and affection he craved for.

What is surprising is that for a boy with such a violent desire to possess the mother's attention, Curzon projects no defence

¹ Mosley, op.cit., p.57.

² Ibid,pp.56-7.

³ Ibid., p.57.

mechanism of self-protection through outbreaks of jealousy or death-wish against the father. At no stage does he display violent feelings of hatred against the father. The traditional oedipus complex is conspicuous by its absence. Curzon, even as a child, harbours no emotional antagonism against the father who is supposed to be the rightful owner of his mother. One can only conclude that he did not view the father as a rival.

On the contrary it appears that Curzon held his father in great esteem and strove hard to be the comfort and blessing that Lord Scarsdale hoped he would be. His father may have caused him discomfort by constantly warning him about not getting a swollen head. Nevertheless, Curzon seems to have unhesitatingly turned to him when in trouble or in need and the old man does not seem to have failed him. At Eton when master Oscar Browning was accused by the Headmaster of imposing his "irrepressible attention" on Curzon, it was surprisingly the stern Lord Scarsdale who came to the rescue, declining to pay attention to the rumours.¹ When Curzon got his first cabinet appointment he immediately sent off the Prime Minister's letter offering the appointment to his father, "knowing how keen an interest greater I truly think than my own you have taken in my promotion."² On another occasion Lord Scarsdale's gruff congratulations upon Curzon's appointment to the Viceroyalty sent Curzon into a flood of tears. Curzon's reaction almost conveys as though the whole effort of achieving the Viceroyalty was geared towards receiving such a

¹ Lord Scarsdale to Browning, July 14, 1874, CA.141.

² Curzon to Lord Scarsdale, Nov.12, 1891, CA.270.

recognition. Mary testified that her husband's outburst of emotion upon receiving his father's congratulation was, "the happy sobs of a son who has been recognised at last by his own"¹ Upon her death it was to his father and to Kedleston that Curzon had gone with his three motherless daughters, trying to find there the comfort and love he had lost. Lord Scarsdale responded unflinchingly.

Curzon continued a steady contact with his father after his marriage even though he could not have been unaware of Mary's antagonism towards him. Lord Scarsdale was invited to stay at Curzon's home in the country, the Priory.² Curzon rented Inverlocky Castle in Scotland in the autumn of 1896 a year and a half after his marriage. He would regularly take his father along even though he knew that Mary did not much care for the arrangement.³ Curzon confided to his father about Mary's disappointment at giving birth to a third daughter. "It is a blow her child being a girl," he wrote to his father referring to the birth of Alexandra. "But she will feel it more than I since in these matters a man philosophises whereas a woman cannot. She seems to have got through splendidly which is the main thing."⁴

In spite of all the stories of Rev. Lord Scarsdale's legendary frugalities, his children lived well. The family was also known to vacation in London staying at the Burlington Hotel. There is no mention of a permanent London house as Lord Scarsdale rarely took his seat in the House of Lords. The visits to London were more in the form of outings. The Scarsdale children loved these visits to the metropolis where they were taken to the tailors to be fitted

¹ Mosley, op.cit., p.72.

² Nicolson, op.cit., p.90.

³ Ibid., p.98.

⁴ Curzon to Lord Scarsdale, March 24, 1904, CA.266/1-3.

into new clothes. There were trips to the pantomimes and to Madame Tussaud's.¹ Goodies came in large hampers from Fortnum and Masons, London's leading confectioners. At eight, Curzon was called to lay the foundation stone for a school at Kedleston and to deliver an address. His pleased father allowed him to ride home on his grey cob thereafter.² Curzon had his own pony before he was five and he drove the pony through the park at Kedleston accompanied by a footman who walked at the pony head.³ He was also presented with a heavy gold watch which he proudly sported on his double-breasted jacket.⁴

In the earliest diary kept by Curzon, a Harwood's Pocket Diary, it is evident that cousins and grandparents Senhouse frequently came to stay at Kedleston. Curzon had marked out in pencil birthdays and wedding days of parents, grandparents, uncles and aunts, and presents were exchanged. On his seventh birthday Curzon records, "I had nice presents Eugene & Granville Smith came and spent the day with us. We had such fun. We had a dinner party also." There are occasional excursions with Blanche. On Friday, February 2, Curzon says, "I went with Mama to Barton in her pony carriage." Sometimes he walked with both parents: "Walk to the village with Mama & Papa after Church." Lord Scarsdale would go to London and bring

¹ Reminiscences on Early Life, CA.75.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

grandfather with him. There were the inevitable presents. "G. Papa gave me a pretty little glass stand with Decanter, & 6 glasses, for Liquor." Three days later when the old man left, Curzon wrote, "We were very sorry." Probably the Scarsdale grandmama was not so popular. There is an exclamation mark behind the entry recording her return from Aunt Sophy's in Balbro! Even at this early age Curzon shows signs of developing into an accountant. He records the purchase of a kaleidoscope for 1 sh., a string barrel for 4 sh. and a leather purse for 1 sh. Lord Scarsdale, it seems had a fetish for accounts and details and he passed this trait on to his son.¹ Half a century later, Curzon while making an inventory of Kedleston in his father's "60 year reign" said, "he kept every bill even for 1/6 or 2/6. . There is every detail about the great estate and thousands of other things. There are all the school room and school books of every member of the Curzon family for a century."² Every year the family also took holidays at the seaside. As with other noblemen, with them travelled vast quantities of household things from their estate in Derbyshire. Alfred Curzon, a younger brother, mentions a few in his diary: "The yellow piano, perambulator, Papa's writing table and different boxes etc. come later by a luggage train. Such work to get piano in school room and up the stairs."³

¹ All information is taken from Curzon's Diary, 1866 CA.191.

² Curzon to Grace, Sept. 23, 1916, CA.280.

³ Alfred Curzon, Diary, by courtesy 7th Baron Scarsdale. Hon Alfred Curzon (1860-1920).