# THE LIFE OF LORD CURZON

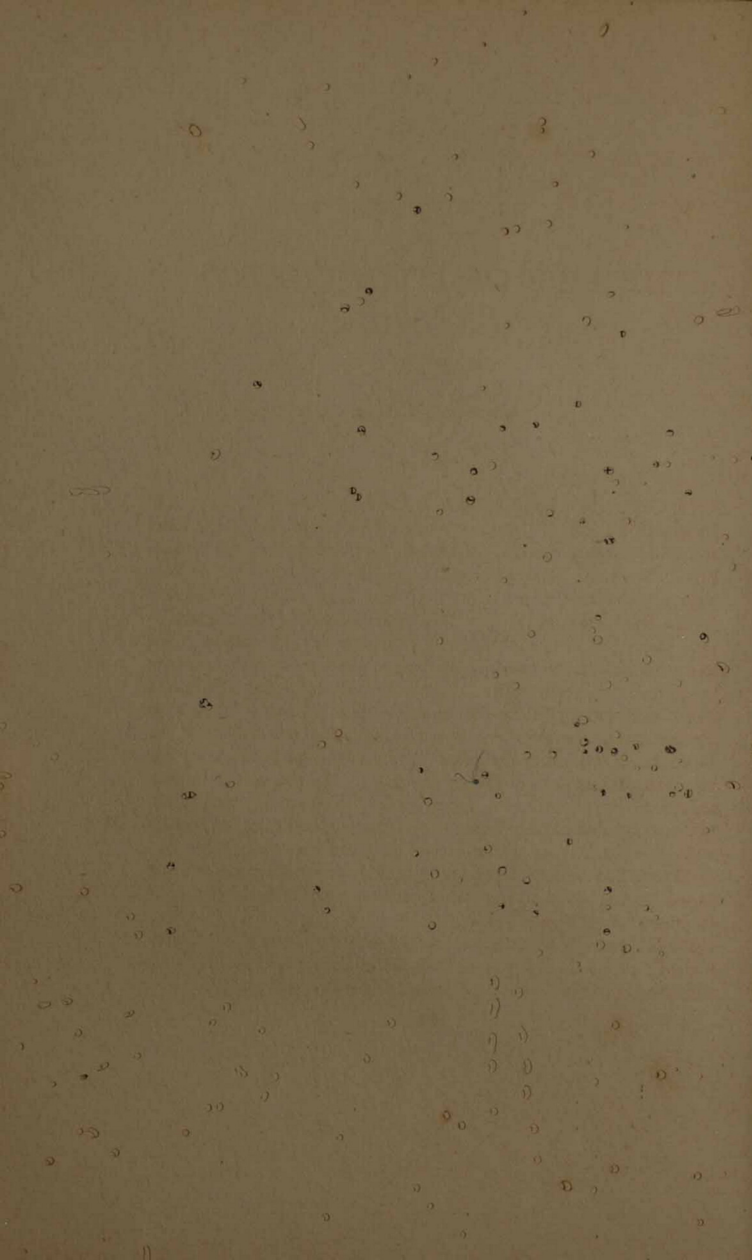
## CHAPTER I

### AFTER SEVEN YEARS

1906

Lord Curzon reached England on December the 3rd, 1905. On December the 4th, Mr. Balfour tendered his resignation to the King and on December the 5th, Sir Henry Campbell Bannerman became Prime Minister. The returned exile found parties and policies strangely different from what they had been when he had left England seven years before. His brief holiday in the country in 1904 had been too troubled with domestic anxiety and with the thorny problems which had arisen in connection with his own policy in India, to permit him to give much thought to controversies which were monopolising the attention of politicians at home. On the outstanding question which was agitating the minds of the electors, and loosening the party loyalties of a generation, he had no strong leanings one way or the other. He was neither a Protectionist nor an orthodox Free Trader. One thing only in the situation seemed to him to be beyond dispute, and that was that no such shock had been administered to a political party since Mr. Gladstone had driven the wedge of Irish Home Rule into the heart of the Liberal party on the eve of his own entry into the House of Commons twenty years before.

He had been doubtful from the first of the merits of Mr. Chamberlain's programme; but he had never been in doubt as to its almost certain effect upon the fortunes of the Unionist party.



"I do not believe that the continued existence of the Empire depends upon Preferential Tariffs (though I am personally ready to throw away any number of 'fly-blown phylacteries'). But it looks to me as if the future existence of the Unionist Party for some years at any rate, were likely to be compromised by the manner in which the question has been raised."[1]

Such observation of the trend of events as he had made in 1904 had confirmed him in this belief. "I do not think that Chamberlain's views are making way in the country," he told Lord Ampthill, "and I believe that our party will be beaten at the next election by an overwhelming majority."[2]

He had always been an admirer of Mr. Chamberlain's courage and had delighted in his robust Imperialism, but he had never felt great confidence in his judgment. And now, as he saw him carrying the fiery cross of the new Protection across the land, making the tactical blunders to which his impetuosity had more than once committed him in the past, announcing an enquiry *after* instead of *before* commending his policy to the country—the worst mistake of all, Lord Curzon thought—he recalled the embarrassments caused to himself as Under Secretary for Foreign Affairs seven years before, by what had seemed to him to be equally impetuous and ill judged excursions on the part of the then Colonial Secretary into the arena of international relations. From the point of view of the Under Secretary Mr. Chamberlain's speeches on the Chinese question had been particularly unfortunate. There had been one speech in which he had outlined a policy which had certainly seemed to be little in accord with the policy of Her Majesty's Government—so far at least as that policy was known. What Mr. Chamberlain was understood to be advising, if not actually forecasting, was an Alliance with one of the foremost military Powers on the continent—one of those entangling Alliances which Lord Salisbury had so far studiously avoided. And the penalty of his impetuosity on that occasion had been a stormy discussion in the House of Commons in which he had been challenged by Her Majesty's Opposition to

[1] Letter to Mr. H. O. Arnold Forster, September 10th, 1903.
[2] Letter to Lord Ampthill, July 19th, 1904.

reconcile his speech with his continuance in office. Of all those who had listened to his explanation the Under Secretary had done so with the greatest degree of apprehension.

> "Chamberlain after some slashing hits at Harcourt and the other side," he told Lord Salisbury in the account which he subsequently gave him of the debate, "came terribly to grief over the effort to explain and defend at the same time that he extenuated and minimised his Birmingham speech. We suffered agonies on the front bench as he proceeded to explain *seriatim* how we were not strong enough without an ally to stand up against Russia in the Far East, to preserve the independence of China, to exercise a controlling influence there or even to maintain 'the open door'!—Meanwhile in all our minds was the reflection—*que diable allait il faire dans cette galère?* Why this dissertation on the high principles of policy from one not primarily responsible for their execution? Of course I breathe not a word of this outside. But to you I may confess that that half hour was one to me of unmitigated gloom."[1]

From that time onwards Mr. Chamberlain's appearances on the platform always filled him with feelings of nervous apprehension. "I wish that Mr. Chamberlain would not make speeches about sands in the hour glass," he wrote from India, "or indeed any speeches at all."[2]

And he no more trusted his judgment in 1906 than he had done in 1898. With the main object of his Tariff Reform campaign—that of drawing closer the bonds of Empire—he was, needless to say, in complete accord. But he thought his procedure crude and his programme ill thought out. India had apparently been altogether overlooked; yet the position of India was clearly one that must be taken into account in any scheme of Imperial Federation on a Tariff basis. And Lord Curzon had lost no time in ordering his Finance Department to collect the necessary data for an adequate statement of India's case—data which had provided the basis in

[1]Letter dated June 12th, 1898.
[2]Letter to Lord Selborne, September 28th, 1899.

due course of an official presentation of the Government of India's views. But the fact that the initiative in the matter had had to come from himself, had not been calculated to give him confidence in Mr. Chamberlain's grasp of the problem which he had set out to solve.

> "Of course he forgot all about India when he launched it (his scheme)," he wrote in August 1903. "I often wonder what would have become of him and us, if he had ever visited India. He would have become the greatest Indian Imperialist of the time. The Colonies would have been dwarfed and forgotten, and the pivot of the Empire would have been Calcutta. Not having enjoyed this good fortune we are now forgotten and the Empire is to be bound together (or, as we are told, if the prescription is not taken, destroyed) without any apparent reference to its largest and most powerful unit."[1]

It was certainly no pedantic attachment to an economic doctrine that prevented him from giving his support to the Tariff Reform party, for he took an eminently practical view of such matters. He regarded Political Economy as one aspect only of the science of government—"perhaps the least exact"—and the fiscal policy of a nation as a matter that should be regulated "not by crusted and immutable dogmas, but by considerations of expediency and self-interest," which might very well differ not only in different countries at the same time, but in the same country at different times. He had never in fact regarded Free Trade as "the Law and the Covenant"; and had advised those of his friends who had sought his opinion when the question had first arisen, to beware of committing themselves irrevocably either to Free Trade or to Protection. "I quite understand the difficulties in which you and your friends are placed at home," he wrote in 1903, "and I think I should have advised them to plump a little less strongly for Free Trade than some of them appear to have done. . . . Winston Churchill's attitude seems to me not less dogmatic than that of Mr. Chamberlain."[2]

[1] Letter to Lord Northbrook, August 12th, 1903.
[2] Letter to Sir Ian Malcolm, November 26th, 1903.

His complaint was not that the Tariff Reform party sought to violate an immutable doctrine but rather that they were not sufficiently practical in their own proposals. "—no one talks in any thing but generalities," he told Sir Clinton Dawkins, "and I want to get to business and see what happens in the first concrete case. Show me exactly what any one Colony is prepared to do. Threaten some foreign country and let me see what will come of it." But this was precisely what he could not persuade anyone to do.

> "Russia, in order to punish England for the Sugar Convention," he reminded his correspondent, "increased her duty on Indian tea. I thought I would give these doughty reformers a lead, so I wired home and offered to raise our Indian tax on Russian petroleum. The Cabinet might have been expected to jump at it—a first illustration! But they shied at once, for Russia threatened to punish us, raising some other tax against Great Britain. Accordingly nothing happened."[1]

These various considerations confirmed him in his belief that the Unionist party was heading for disaster and added to his determination not to accept any share of the responsibility for it.

> "For my own part," he told Sir Schomberg McDonnell, early in 1905, "whatever the future I shall be glad to be out of the next Election. I certainly would not stand for the House of Commons nor would I take any active part in the contest. I have not the slightest objection to a policy of retaliation. But to regard it as a positive programme upon which Elections can be won or a party enthused seems to me absurd. I view the present position of the party with intense distress and almost dismay. Chamberlain has utterly broken it to pieces and will not I believe re-unite it on a protectionist basis. We may come in again after some time because of Radical mistakes but not by making Protection a one plank programme. On the other hand A. J.B.'s programme, though innocuous, seems to me from the platform point of view even worse. We can retaliate

[1] Letter to Sir Clinton Dawkins, November 11th, 1903.

now if we have the pluck, and even supposing the country were to ratify the policy, I doubt our making use of it. A fiscal policy can only be successfully enforced if it has a good deal of backing on both sides. No Conservative Government would make retaliatory arrangements that were certain to be reversed by the Liberals a few years later. I have, therefore, not the slightest desire to carry any standard in the fiscal campaign. I regard the whole thing as a huge mistake and do not believe that the party will pull itself together again until it has reverted to saner lines and much more important things."[1]

During his brief stay in England after his return from India, he received offers of half a dozen safe seats including a flattering invitation tendered to him "in no party spirit but on national grounds," by a very large number of bankers, merchants and others interested in the Trade and Commerce of the City of London; but he adhered firmly to his resolve and refused to be drawn into the contest.

Dissatisfaction with political developments was not, however, the only cause of a certain distaste for life in England of which he was conscious at this time. He was living under the influence of that reaction which no man who has served his country in a high administrative capacity abroad, can fail to experience on his return. More especially is this the case if his service has been in India where, apart altogether from his administrative work, he has been the centre of a semi-royal court and has had at his beck and call a large and varied entourage. Lord Curzon, who had thrown himself with so much zest into the social and ceremonial side of his duties in India and had attached so great an importance to the dignity of his office, must have felt the change acutely even in the most favourable circumstances. And the circumstances of his return had been far from favourable. Generous recognition of his work in India had been accorded him in the press, and he had been warmly welcomed by the rank and file of the Conservative party. But his relations with the party leaders were necessarily strained, and

[1]Letter dated February 23rd, 1905.

for this reason proposals made for according him a public welcome were marked by a certain degree of hesitation. A plan for entertaining him at a public banquet halted and finally, at his own request, was dropped. Such a dinner, he pointed out, would scarcely be a compliment unless it was attended by the leading members of both political parties and by all who had served as Viceroy, Governor, Lieutenant-Governor and Commander-in-Chief in India. But would the members of the late Government be willing to attend? "Either the best that can be given or nothing would be my own feeling," he explained when sounded on the matter. "It would of course be marked if the late Government . . . were wholly to abstain."[1]

The time was soon to come when Lord Curzon's difficulty was to choose amongst the number of invitations that poured in upon him. "Being more or less detached," he told Lord Selborne two years later, "I am expected to attend every dinner and give away every prize in the kingdom." But during the first months of his return, he remained aloof, and it was not until April, and then as the guest of a purely non-political body, the Pilgrims, under the chairmanship of Lord Roberts, that he made his first public appearance and delivered his first speech since leaving India.

He had, in fact, thrown out roots which had struck too deep into the soil of that country to permit him as yet to adjust himself to the demands of public life in England. "My heart is still in poor old India," he admitted to Ian Malcolm. And after a short three weeks in England, at the end of 1905, he withdrew to the South of France, whence he could view the progress of events at home in the comfortable perspective given them as much by his own attitude of detachment as by actual distance from the scene, while devoting himself to those Indian matters which still loomed so large on his mental horizon. A selection of his Indian speeches for publication in England was passing through the press; and he gave to the preparation of the volume the minute attention to detail to which all his publishers found themselves obliged to submit. "I think that like many photogravure portraits my likeness is much too dark," he wrote. "I might almost be a Hottentot. Can I not be relieved of

[1] Letter to Sir S. McDonnell, December 28th, 1905.

this suspicion?"[1] Even the size of the pages excited his adverse comment. He compared them with those of a volume of the "Life of Lord Granville," which he happened to have with him, and found them a quarter of an inch narrower. He wanted to know the reason —"my book ought not to be a whit narrower than that book," he exclaimed.[2] So far as possible matters were adjusted to meet his wishes, and on April the 20th, the speeches with notes by the author and an introduction by Sir Thomas Raleigh were submitted to the public.

His comments on affairs at home were those of a mildly interested and somewhat cynical spectator. Everyone in England seemed to him to "talk, chatter, gossip and shout"; but nobody *did* anything. It was "*far niente* without the *dolce*." The landslide suffered by the Unionist Party was no surprise to him; the temper of the new House of Commons was.

> "Politics are in a strange way," he wrote in March. "Winston kicking over the traces and making indiscreet and verbose speeches. A.J.B. eternally pirouetting on an eternal dialectical wire amid yells of execration from the newly constituted House; Joe unable to grapple with the fierce and contemptuous Philistinism of the Radical majority; the Labour Members impressing everyone by ability, sincerity and eager desire to see something done; a new Tory light named Smith sprung up with a brilliant first oration from Liverpool; the party still hopelessly sundered on Tariff question and at present shrieking for the blood of E. Clarke and R. Cecil. Milner about to be publicly censured by the House of Commons."[3]

One thing added to his sense of isolation and neglect. Seven years of his life and strength he had given to India. Health—and very possibly his career—he had offered up in willing sacrifice upon the altar of public duty. In spite of the fact that the curtain had been rung down upon a stage clouded with the dust of con-

[1] Letter to Messrs. Macmillan, February 27th, 1906.
[2] *Ibid.*, January 15th, 1906.
[3] Letter to Sir Ian Malcolm, March 18th, 1906.

troversy, the outstanding value of his Viceroyalty had been freely recognised in the press. Yet he alone of a long line of Indian Viceroys remained without official recognition of his services. The omission was all the more marked by contrast with the acknowledgment accorded not merely to previous Viceroys—Lord Elgin and Lord Lansdowne had both received the Garter—but to others among his own contemporaries whose service abroad has been brilliant, but not more brilliant, surely, than his own. Neither Cromer in Egypt nor Milner in South Africa had been thus pointedly ignored. His known unwillingness to accept any honour from the Government which, by refusing him their support, had driven him to resignation, did not, in his opinion, justify the continued neglect from which he suffered, for they had been replaced by a new Government within a few days of his relinquishing his charge. Nor could it be argued that in such cases the bestowal of an honour was a party matter, for Lord Lansdowne had been honoured on the recommendation of a Liberal, and Lord Elgin on that of a Conservative Prime Minister.

Pondering upon this and other circumstances attending his return from exile, he may well have reflected bitterly upon the contrast which it provided to the picture of it which, during those long years of absence, he had so often conjured up. In place of the joyous re-union with the intimate friends of seven years ago, there lay across his path the splintered fragments of at least one lifelong friendship; in place of the plaudits of grateful and admiring colleagues there hung about him an atmosphere of chill neglect. Even the door to public life, in which for something like a quarter of a century he had lived and moved and had his being, seemed suddenly closed against him, for added to his own disinclination to stand for the House of Commons was the opinion of his Sovereign, emphatically expressed, that no ex-Viceroy ought to return to the rough and tumble of political life inseparable from candidature for the Lower Chamber; while entry to the Second Chamber which, in view of the office which he had filled, seemed to him to be his almost as of right, was obstinately denied him.

His cup seemed full indeed. "One wonders when the hail storm that rains upon us is to stop," he wrote in the spring of this first

year at home; "we are nearly beaten to the ground."[1] Yet before the year was many weeks older a final and more crushing blow was dealt him, for in July, Lady Curzon, with whom in all the ups and downs of life he had shared in tenderest intimacy the joys of victory and the sorrows of defeat, was taken from him.

Strewn across the pages of these volumes are to be found indications of the ties by which these two people were united. And it is important that the character of their relations should be realised; for no portrait of Lord Curzon which did not take into account the depth of devotion of which he was capable—and which he did actually lavish on Lady Curzon—would be a true one. He himself uttered a profound truth when he wrote in a letter to Lady Curzon—"most men are not understood of their own generation, for human nature is really very complex, and yet ignoring our own complexity, we expect every one else to be simple."[2] How complex a nature was Lord Curzon's must long since have become clear; and it was not the least part of its complexity that, while intellectually he had always been unusually mature, he remained throughout his life curiously childlike in his emotions. His religious faith, as I have had occasion to point out ere now, was almost on a par with that of a good, but incurious boy. And in daily life, for all his seeming strength and self-sufficiency, he was extraordinarily dependent upon others for his happiness. When the race was to the swift and the battle to the strong, he must have someone to whom to bring the spoils of victory. Still more when failure dogged his footsteps must he have someone to whom to lay bare his soul. With an amazing wealth of sympathy, and understanding, Lady Curzon had from the first given him in full measure the intellectual and emotional companionship which he craved. In India where other intimacies were denied him, he turned with ever increasing dependence and delight to the one source of comfort which was open to him. And no man ever received in greater abundance than he did, the precious gift for which he asked. "There is no happiness so great to a woman," she wrote, "as the admiration she can feel to the depths of her heart for her Belovedest."

[1]Letter to Lady Curzon.
[2]Letter dated November 30th, 1904.

Her serious illness in the autumn of 1904 had shaken Lord Curzon to the foundations of his being. "Amid all the great misery that we have been through," he wrote on November the 25th, on the eve of his departure for India, "there shines out the consolation of many happy hours and tender moments and the memory of your beautiful and ineffaceable love. We have been drawn very close by this companionship in the furnace of affliction and I hope that it may leave me less selfish and more considerate in the future. To me you are everything and the sole thing in the world; and I go on existing in order to come back and try to make you happy."

His return to India without her had brought back poignant memories of former days. "We had such a delicious day," she had written in her diary, when describing one of their brief holidays in the hills near Simla six years before. "I trudged about with George from one beat to another, and as birds were plentiful he had excellent sport. The little Maharaja who hovered near us kept begging me to get into his dhoolie. He could not understand a woman who walked all day behind guns." And now as he landed at Bombay to take up once more, but this time alone, the burden of the Viceroyalty, the contrast with that earlier landing in 1899 was more than he could bear and he broke down miserably when, in proposing his health, Lord Lamington made a touching reference to Lady Curzon's absence. At Calcutta the familiar, but now untenanted rooms at Government House seemed to mock at him. "I have not dared to go into your room," he wrote, "for fear that I should burst out crying. And, indeed, I am utterly miserable and desolate. Nobody to turn to or talk to, memories on all sides of me and anxiety gnawing at my heart . . . It is a misery even to tear myself from writing to you and never in my life have I felt so forlorn and cast down."[1]

And then had come the unexpected and joyful news that she was well enough to travel—"Was not yesterday the happiest day for years?" he sang. "For I got Frank's amazing telegram to say that you were actually coming. . . . I could hardly credit it and I went dancing off to the Belvedere Ball (usually the most hateful of functions) in an almost indecent state of glee. I told everybody and

[1]Letter dated December 11th, 1904.

they were all in a wild state of exultation. K. looked a new man and the room was one vast smile."[1] From the depths of depression he rose on a wave of hope to dizzy heights of joy—"This is positively the last letter that I can write to you before we meet in person. My heart dances at the thought of you drawing steadily closer over the leagues of ocean." It would be ten days, he calculated, before the letter would reach her, but four days after that she would herself be with him and "the long deep chasm of separation" would have been filled up. One thought dominated every other—that she had turned back from the very threshold of death's portals and had risen from her bed of suffering to return to him. "This will be like beginning life again after a hideous interlude and all my efforts will be directed to make the new life happy and sweet—happier and sweeter if possible than the old. Every night and morning I thank God that you are coming out."[2]

At this glorious prospect joy welled up from his innermost being and expressed itself elementally in song. In a volume entitled "War Poems and Other Translations," published by Lord Curzon in 1915, appeared one poem described as a Love Song from the Indian—

"I would have torn the stars from the Heavens for your necklace,
I would have stripped the rose-leaves for your couch from all the
trees,
I would have spoiled the East of its spices for your perfume,
The West of all its wonders to endower you with these.

"I would have drained the ocean, to find its rarest pearldrops,
And melt them for your lightest thirst in ruby draughts of wine;
I would have dug for gold till the earth was void of treasure,
That, since you had no riches, you might freely take of mine.

"I would have drilled the sunbeams to guard you through the
daytime,
I would have caged the nightingales to lull you to your rest;
But love was all you asked for, in waking or in sleeping,
And love I give you, sweetheart, at my side and on my breast."

[1]Letter dated January 21st, 1905.
[2]Letter dated February 16th, 1905.

The words were Lord Curzon's own—his hymn of thanksgiving offered up at Simla in 1905 as he stood on the threshold of what did, indeed, seem to him to be a fresh lease of life, snatched from the very jaws of death. Alas! The new life dawned only to die away again; and when the blow fell it struck him with stunning force. "I have seen it coming," he wrote on July the 22nd, 1906, only four days after her life had ebbed away, "and dared not avow it to her or even to myself. . . . We lay her to rest peacefully, no one here, no show. This is as she would have wished."[1]

Bowed low with grief Lord Curzon remained alone, his sole distraction the answering of the flood of letters of condolence that poured in upon him. "I have never got further than this," he wrote from Kedleston on August the 9th, "where I have been hiding my head in loneliest misery."[2] And time was slow in dulling the edge of pain, for twelve months later he wrote, "I am conscious of no courage, only a sort of mute endurance."[3]

How widespread was the sympathy which his grief evoked was demonstrated by the mass of messages—over 1,150—which he received. Of these he answered with his own hand during those sombre August days not less than eight hundred and fifty.

[1]Letter to Sir Ian Malcolm. [2]*Ibid.*
[3]Letter to Sir S. McDonnell, July 21st, 1907.