

CHAPTER XI

THE HUMAN SIDE OF K.

K WAS dining at our mess that night, and on entering the ante-room it looked very well, with red curtains, red shades to the lamps, red covered easy chairs and pots of red geraniums in the fireplaces. He was evidently rather impressed for, stopping short in the doorway, he looked round and said: "Hum! this is the result of being localised."

I think it is "The Gentleman with a Duster," in his *Mirrors of Downing Street*, who tells us that although Lord Kitchener had many admirers he was liked by few, and it is doubtful whether anyone loved him.

Shades of Hubert Hamilton, FitzGerald and Frankie Maxwell, do you hear this? Loyal and faithful "Birdie," do these words make you squirm with indignation? Reading them myself, my thoughts went back at once to that spring evening in 1905 when, taking Hubert Hamilton in to dinner in the 3rd Gurkha mess at Almora, our conversation turned on to the Chief sitting opposite us. Anything like the look on Hamilton's face, when his whispering became eloquent through emotion, I had never seen before. Many things he told me of his hero, exemplifying his wonderful forethought, judgment and kindliness. Of the South African campaign he said:

"Who do you suppose settled up the South African War? Do you think the Boers could have been induced to come to terms without K.? I am firmly convinced it was entirely due to his personality, prestige and firmness that we were enabled to arrange matters at all, and that no one else could possibly have done it. I have been on his staff in Egypt, South Africa and India, and simply love him."

An amusing incident, indicating his cross eye, occurred when he was saying good night. Two youngsters put their hands out together, each thinking he was being looked at! It was an awkward moment, but K. passed it off with a laugh.

When he left us it was to stay with the Gaseles¹ at Naini Tal. On departure he said: "I've enjoyed my visit very much," and turning to me added: "I must modify my opinion about localised units! The abandonment of Almora will remain in abeyance at present." Shortly afterwards we got an official notification to the same effect, and that is the last that has ever been said about it.

The first nineteen miles of the journey to Naini Tal was done on hired ponies along a narrow hill track, and I rode alone with K. We made a bad start, for the station staff officer had given him, for the first stage all down hill, a wretched little tat about 12½ hands high, with a goose rump, no shoulder, and cow hocks. I did not dare offer to change, as my own hill pony I was riding was a perfect fiend to shy.

K. looked very cross, especially as the pony stumbled occasionally. Trying a remark about the surrounding country being so excellent for training was not encouraging, for he only snapped out:

"Oh, I dare say, but it is all *far* too remote from the railway."

The thought came to me that I was in for a bad three hours' ride, but after four or five miles there was a change of ponies, and to my joy I noted the best hireling in the district was ready waiting. Lengthening the stirrups for him, to his injunction, "Make 'em as long as your arm," K. got up and started off at a canter.

As soon as he realised the splendid paces of the pony he was on, his ill-humour entirely vanished, and when I caught him up he was cantering along, flapping his disengaged arm and actually *singing*. Much more than a loud hum, something with words, though quite unintelligible. When we slowed down to a walk he asked me at what sort of pace we generally did such long rides, and laid down the dictum that the proper way was to trot or canter a mile or two, then walk the same distance, and so

¹The late General Sir Alfred Gaselee, then G.O.C. Eastern Command.

on. I didn't dare tell him that once, in a hurry, I had done those nineteen miles in an hour and twenty minutes!

During this ride another trait of Kitchener's came to light to confute those enemies of his who called him a butcher. Some of the hills on each side were very wild and precipitous, and at one place he pointed at a bluff saying it was like some ground near Simla where he had been taken out to shoot *ghoral* (wild goat).

"Poor little beggars," he said, "I sat on a rock with two rifles beside me, and dozens of them were driven towards me on the opposite side of the ravine by hundreds of coolies, quite unconscious of the fate awaiting them. I didn't like it a bit."

Lady Gaselee did not seem to find Kitchener such a delightful guest, during this three days' visit to Naini Tal, as we had done at Almora. She wrote to my wife asking what on earth we had done to K., as he arrived in such a bad temper! On arrival he had only grunted when she told him there was a big dinner in his honour that night, a garden party the next day and a picnic the day after. When she asked him if he would like to walk out and look at the lake, he told her he could see it from his bedroom window! Finally, at the dinner and garden party, he would not speak to a soul! The good lady had not employed her usual tact. K. hated entertainments, and she had given him a surfeit.

The next time I came across Kitchener was at the Indian Bisley rifle meetings at Meerut. I forget how many meetings, but during one of them I remember taking him to see the new "Rexer" quick-firing gun which some enthusiasts insisted on showing him. Riding home I tried to get his opinion on it, but only elicited a loud and long-drawn-out "H—u—m." Quite enough, however, to convey to me the fact that he was not enamoured of it.

He also made a long address on musketry before one presentation of prizes, afterwards helping Lady Gaselee to give them away. He was rather snappish with me when he saw what dozens there were to be presented, saying he should never catch his train. As it was then 4 p.m., his train went at 9.30 and the station was a fifteen-minute drive, I only laughed. But he was in an awful hurry all the time, and Lady Gaselee got quite rattled at the way he kept pushing the cups at her, saying, sotto voce :

"Go on, go on, give the man his prize, can't you? Don't haver over it." She, poor lady, was trying to say a few nice words to each winner!

While in command of a battalion of the 7th Gurkhas (sometimes ironically called "Kitchener's Own"), and at home on leave, I was requested to address a large assembly of "might-be" Territorials, in the north-west of England, in the interests of recruitment. It was at this meeting I first realised the enormous hold K. had obtained over the British public. During my speech I referred to some remarks recently made by Lord Kitchener to the Calcutta Volunteers. No sooner had I mentioned the name than the whole hall burst out into applause. Remarking, on its subsidence, how delighted I was to note the approbation with which Lord Kitchener's— Here I had to stop again, for the cheering was deafening directly the name was out of my mouth.

Not daring to say "Kitchener" any more, I explained in a roundabout way that the reason I was so particularly gratified was because he happened to be my colonel. This remark was received in stony silence and with every mark of disapprobation. Such an audience could in no way understand how the Commander-in-Chief in India could possibly be a *colonel*! In fact my address was entirely spoilt by this unfortunate remark, the audience looking upon me as an infernal humbug. As this was the second time I had been let down by a reference to Kitchener's colonelcy of the 7th Gurkhas, I was careful never to mention it again.

Kitchener was a "big man" in every sense of the word. One cannot conceive him doing a contemptible action. An instance of his lack of all pettiness was told me by the Chief of the Staff, Sir Beauchamp Duff, personally.

Soon after Lord Curzon resigned, K. received some manuscript from a first-class English magazine containing a hand-written article dealing with the Kitchener-Curzon controversy. The publisher said they could not divulge the name of the writer, but he would like to know before issue whether Kitchener objected to its publication. Finding it was a violent attack upon himself, K. handed it over to Duff to read. The latter asking, after perusal, if he might make some enquiries about it—as he thought he knew the handwriting—was given permission to do so.

These enquiries proved the author to be a well-known colonel of the Indian Army, who was very clever with his pen. Duff, bringing this information to the Chief, asked what he would like done about it.

"Write and ask him whether he wrote it," said K., looking up from his table.

This was done, and the colonel replied that he couldn't remember! There the matter ended.

A few months later, a brigade becoming vacant, Duff took three or four names up to K. for appointment. The top name was that of this very colonel. Duff told me he expected it to be scratched out at once. On the contrary, after careful scrutiny of this officer's confidential reports, K. put him in without a word.

The relations between Kitchener and his personal staff were most devoted; indeed might be called affectionate. They all appeared just as strongly attached to him, as he was to them. Of all, perhaps "Birdie" did him the most wonderfully faithful service, and undoubtedly FitzGerald was the best beloved. The connection between the two was extraordinary, for while FitzGerald worshipped the ground K. trod on, K., in his turn, treated him as a dearly loved son.

FitzGerald's influence with Kitchener was enormous, but one never heard even a hint of it being misused. During the period K. was unemployed after leaving India, FitzGerald was beside me at the Quetta Staff College. There had just been a regular press campaign at home regarding K.'s unemployment. Sarcastic comments were made about the debasement of our greatest soldier by his acceptance of the chairmanship of the London, Chatham and Dover Railway. During a long walk together, FitzGerald and I discussed this, as well as the question of K.'s succession to Lord Minto as Viceroy, which it was known he so greatly desired. FitzGerald did not tell me all he knew, but one remark of his amused me immensely: "I keep writing to him begging him whatever is said to keep his mouth shut, telling him that if he does this he is bound to come out top dog!"

Regarding the succession to Lord Minto it is interesting to record that at a very big dinner given to some notable or other at the Bengal Club in Calcutta in 1910, the appointment of K. as Viceroy was freely discussed after dinner. The

commercial magnates in Calcutta are shrewd and knowledgeable men, yet there was not one single dissentient voice on this question.

Talking of Calcutta reminds me of an anecdote about a dinner Kitchener gave to the Japanese military attaché there, Colonel —. The latter's English was not his strong point. During conversation K. asked him what would be the principal sights should he visit Japan. The little colonel gave a list of local wonders, some of which caused K. to remark that they did not appear quite "proper." The attaché, not at all understanding what his host said, simply answered, smiling: "Yes, yes, verree nice, verree nice"!

Kitchener always wanted the *best*. Nothing short of this satisfied him. It fretted him to live in an atmosphere where things were standing still, when they could so easily be bettered. When improvement was within his grasp he made it. This of course led to changes and alterations. People affected, sometimes found these unpalatable, and abused K. as a man who was never content to leave things as they were. True for them, he was not, if his great mind saw advancement was called for. It must have been somewhat discomfoting to them, however, to find he was nearly always right.

Many stories exist of his kindly, helpful nature. Lady Flora Poore allows me to quote one. She must know several, for in 1901-2 Lady Flora and Lady Maxwell, being the only two English ladies in Pretoria, always sat on Lord Kitchener's right and left.

In 1901 Lady Flora, whose husband (Major R. M. Poore, 7th Hussars) was on the head-quarters staff at Pretoria, went out to South Africa for the second time, expecting to remain with the other married ladies down at Newcastle, with an odd chance of seeing her husband now and then.

On reaching Cape Town she heard the joyful news that Lord Kitchener had given her leave to go up to Pretoria, which was a great surprise. Lodging at the Grand Hotel she wondered if she could possibly stay as long as a week. When that was about to expire she expected orders daily to return to Natal.

Getting an invitation to dine with the Commander-in-Chief at the end of the week, Lady Flora felt sure she would get her *congé* at the dinner, and was very despondent accord-

ingly. When, however, the Chief came into the room the first thing he said was: "How do you like Pretoria?" and the second: "Have you got a house yet?"! What with delight and astonishment Lady Flora was barely able to gasp out "Not yet," but quickly recovering, added, "Though I shan't be long about it now I have your tacit permission." K. seemed very much amused, and the Poores were established in a house next morning!

•As regards his numerous residences, his desire to make things better became a hobby. Houses, grounds and gardens had to be improved. Snowdon in Simla; Wildflower Hall in Mashobra, beyond Simla; Treasury Gate in Fort William, Calcutta; and Broom Hall, Kent. He had even sketched out in his mind, and talked over with the Mintos, what he would do at Viceregal Lodge were he to be made Viceroy. He often used to say that he ought to have been a house designer and architect instead of a soldier.

It has been said that K. had no sense of humour and could not make a joke if he tried. Never was there a greater misconception. The stout lady and the bed incident in the Simla earthquake has been mentioned. That is perhaps rather clumsy, but here are two more.

When Sir William Meyer, the present High Commissioner for India, became financial adviser to K., he is said to have suggested he should receive some military rank. Kitchener replied he could not see his way to recommending him for a commission, but would gladly promise that Meyer should be given a military funeral, if he died while employed in the Army Department!

An officer of the head-quarters staff in India of very uncouth appearance went by the name of "The Walrus." One cold day he turned up to take papers to the Chief in a new suit of Irish frieze, as stiff as a board. Going into K.'s study, the Chief, after looking hard at him, said: "The Walrus has evidently had a suit made by the carpenter."

Some peculiarities of Lord Kitchener's were:

- (1) He had very small hands for a man, but extraordinarily well formed.
- (2) His hair was much thicker than most people's, and in India he had not a single grey one.
- (3) He carried a well-known danger signal, on seeing

which it was advisable to change the subject or quietly disappear. This took the form of veins swelling on the cheek bones, and caught the eye at once.

(4) His spectacles were rather unusual. The shanks instead of being prolonged behind the ears were so constructed that they maintained the glasses in position by pressure against the temples.

(5) Mention has been made of his constant interjection "Hum" when conversing. It was his favourite method of implying doubt, and the greater the doubt the longer drawn out was the interjection.

Many instances could be quoted of his chivalry. Perhaps the finest was the way in which he always gave to Lord Roberts the entire credit for every advantage we gained in South Africa, including the successful termination of the war itself.

Kitchener did a great deal to promote temperance and reduce venereal disease in the army. He was all for clean living, and I am sure did more to influence the soldier in this matter than any of his predecessors. Not even excepting Lord Roberts, who certainly made great efforts, but finally funk'd "grasping the nettle."

Many will remember that excellent little paper every British soldier received on the way to India, and a somewhat similar note entered in the service book of every man of our expeditionary force in 1914. These were written by K. himself, and he approached the subject in quite a new way.

Although he did not show up as a churchman in India, he was always on the side of religion and clean living, backing up very strongly all efforts to this end, such as the Rev. G. D. Barnes' *League of Honour*, etc.

The influence Kitchener exercised over some people was very great, and his power of persuasion quite uncommon. Here is an instance: When the late Amir of Afghanistan (Habibullah, who remained so staunch to us throughout the war) visited India in 1907, the whole programme of functions and ceremonies was arranged with motor-cars as the means of conveyance. Shortly before his arrival it was ascertained that nothing would induce the Amir to enter a motor. All the timings, therefore, had to be rearranged, and state carriages collected from here, there and everywhere. He was duly met by a state landau, and

the next day lunched with the Commander-in-Chief in his camp.

During the meal Kitchener said he was taking him for a motor drive after luncheon. The Amir was horror-stricken, and said he couldn't think of it. K. insisted, and telling him they would go very slow and he had a special expert, in the shape of a Royal Artillery officer to drive, the Amir eventually gave way. The result was, that afterwards the Amir would not get into a carriage, and all the timings, etc., had to be again altered! A further sequel was that Habibullah bought several cars, and insisted on taking the gunner officer back to Kabul with him!

Time after time have I referred to Kitchener's prevision. It was only miraculous because it was a doctrine he had taken unto himself. Something akin to the "Scouts" motto, "Be Prepared."

Once when talking to Lady Flora Poore of "careers" and about men getting on in the world, he explained how he had always looked on life rather with the eyes of a naturalist, who watches an ant hurrying in some direction, or peers into an ants' nest.

He expounded how this student of nature looked with attention at their comings and goings, and their circumambulations, so as to note carefully what was the actual drift of their activities.

So, said K., has it been with me through life. I would hear of disturbances in Peking. I at once set myself to learn Chinese. Again there would be a rumour of trouble in some other part of the world. Getting books and maps, I would study the past and present history of that country. And so on, always endeavouring to be beforehand with any knowledge that might be of value when the time came.

In his farewell speech at the Simla United Service Club on the 21st August, 1909, he pointed out that *two* main principles underlay all he had tried to do in India: "Firstly, that each step in army reform must be founded on an accepted policy, based upon admitted premises, arrived at either by experience or by reasoning, and laid down in clear language understood by those who have to apply it, and intelligible to those to whom it is to be applied.

"The second principle has been, in all things to look

ahead. To consider not merely for the present, but to lay the foundation for the needs of the future."

Kitchener was simplicity itself. When given any one of his numerous decorations, no one was more childishly pleased; but he was the last man to do the least thing special in order to gain it. Talking of decorations reminds me of an incident that occurred when he was in command of the troops in London at the 1911 coronation, by King George's special desire. In one of the coronation processions Kitchener's G.C.S.I. star came off his tunic, and could not be found anywhere. The police and everyone were informed, and asked to look for it. When K. came to have his field-marshal's boots pulled off he gave a yell of pain. The star had to be cut out of the boot with the aid of a razor!

Although by no means devoid of sympathy this attribute, by the very nature of the man, was seldom openly displayed. Being a real worker, with the highest ideals, he judged everyone from the standard he had set himself. If a man did good work it was not K.'s custom to praise him, because in his opinion he had only done his duty. At the same time censure was very rare.

When he caught a snag he got rid of him. Swept him away. Sometimes this was impossible. It may have been a highly paid appointment, perhaps not directly under K., or there was no one available to succeed. In this case he simply ignored the man and did the work himself.

What was the case when Kitchener went to the War Office in 1914? He found the majority of the best officers, who really knew the up-to-date and highly organised War Office, bound for overseas. To help him he had mainly weak, mediocre men, or men brought back who only knew the institution as it was ten years before. What was the consequence? He did all the work himself.

Even the "Gentleman with a Duster" gives K. credit for high and honest endeavour, yet he describes him as weak and petulant with his colleagues in the Cabinet. This seems highly improbable, for it was not K.'s way. If he could not get what he wanted, especially in a time of stress, his nature was to say: "Very well, you are running the show. I've said what I want. If you won't agree, that's your look out. I can do no more."

As indicated at the commencement of this chapter my endeavour has been to show that Kitchener was a man and not an official machine. If such a man possesses the confidence of a nation to so large an extent that he has only to say a thing is necessary to gain unquestioning response. If, in addition, he possesses character, industry and persistence. If he is also a deep thinker with unique talent for organisation, immense driving power, supernatural foresight, high ideals, reasonableness when convinced, and a desire for efficiency that is absolutely contagious—can he ever be classified as anything but one of the GREATEST OF MEN ?