

CHAPTER XV

SEDITION IN INDIA

BEING at home in 1914 on eight months' leave from my Lucknow appointment, the ominous portents which heralded the advent of the Great War found me in London offering my services to the War Office.

Early in the morning of Saturday, the 1st August, I met a friend, Buckle of the West Kents, with a beaming face, who told me he had just received his orders, and was off to take up some appointment that evening. Agreeing to lunch with me at the "Senior," it was a matter of great surprise when he came to my room soon after noon with a most dejected air, saying his orders had been cancelled, and asking if I had not heard the news.

On saying, "What news?" he told me that a Cabinet Meeting that morning had decided that (even with Belgian neutrality violated) under no circumstances would England enter the war. Hardly believing my ears, I told him such action was impossible, but he replied that there was no doubt about it, and that he was off at once to his home in Surrey. That was the last I ever saw of Buckle, who was killed in action very early in the war.

Returning to the club for lunch, I found Lord Morley at the next table, and evidently in very good-humour with himself, which seemed somewhat to confirm Buckle's report. His presence, after being a party to such an inconceivable decision, quite put me off my own lunch, and it was with a kind of fascination that I watched him put away a large brandy and soda, and a glass of port, with an old brandy in the smoking-room afterwards. Then, to my

relief, he disappeared, when I pondered over the wisdom of the club's rule which makes Cabinet Ministers honorary members, and thought what an advantage the concession must be when they wish to get away from political dissentients.

The next thing to do was to get back to the War Office. Groups of officers were walking about, instead of working, in a very excited manner, and you heard such remarks as: "Good God! how can one ever visit France again or even go overland to Marseilles en route to India," etc., etc.

Wishing to get some confirmation of this Cabinet Meeting decision, I looked up an old pal of mine, who was always full of information. Not finding him in his office, I rang the bell and asked the messenger what Colonel B. was doing, and when he was likely to be in again. From his replies I gathered that B. had gone off indefinitely, with no apparent intention of returning; that he was in a very bad temper, and had used the most appalling language!

The War Office appearing to be a most gloomy and undesirable spot, with no one doing any work, and my wife and belongings being at Westward Ho! the notion took me to go down there. Rushing back to the club, I found I could get a train at 4 p.m. from Paddington to take me as far as Exeter. In the hall I met Sir Henry McMahon, soon to be High Commissioner in Egypt, to whom I imparted the news about the Cabinet Meeting, which, to my great relief, he scoffed at. Still, there was a lot of evidence on the other side, so I decided to carry out my plan of desertion, wired for my car to meet me at Exeter early Sunday, and duly caught the four o'clock train.

On Monday, the 3rd, Sir Edward Grey made his famous speech, and about 3 a.m. the next morning a man shouting outside awoke me with a telegram reading: "Return at once. War Office." The same evening saw me again in London, hearing the glad tidings that the Cabinet had decided to declare war on Germany on account of their invasion of Belgian territory, and that Morley, Haldane and John Burns had accordingly resigned. At the same time a communication was received from the India Office telling me to hold myself in readiness to return at once to

India, which was rather a cold douche after my castles in the air, on the upward journey, of an early crossing to France.

Retiring to bed at my club shortly after midnight, I found the tape recording the fact that we had actually declared war. This momentous news, coupled with grave misgivings as to my success in evading the India Office order, so preyed on my mind, that, sleep being impossible, I changed into flannels and walked the London streets until daybreak.

In Trafalgar Square, about 5 a.m., while drinking a cup of coffee at a stall, one of the London waifs and strays in tattered clothing accosted me, to say he was very hungry and thirsty, had slept on a bench all night, and it was a lovely morning. Inviting him to coffee and buns, he told me, while he drank, what he would do as regards the war, if he were Prime Minister. How he had held responsible positions abroad, but been unfortunate enough to lose them. How he had visited India and the Cape, and still hoped for another appointment somewhere!

He ended up with the coming war again, and the assertion, which astonished me and I pooh-poohed, that it would last for *years*, thus being even before Lord Kitchener in a correct prediction. He talked extremely well, with quite an educated voice, and had evidently seen better days, but I did not press for details of his history. He was a deplorable-looking object, and the three cups of coffee and three buns I stood him must have been very acceptable. Rather to my disgust he insisted on accompanying me back to the club, where the page boy at the entrance to the residential quarters appeared very shocked at my choice of a companion!

Deciding to lay my case—with its extraordinary record of ill-luck about ever getting on service, anywhere—before Sir Edmund Barrow, the military secretary at the India Office, I got close to his door on the 5th August about ten o'clock. Just then he appeared in the passage, looking very worried, with a closely-written sheet of foolscap in his hand. After greeting me he asked if I were very busy, but without waiting for any answer, handed over the paper, with a bunch of keys. He told me he must go at once to the Secretary of State, and would I please

encipher the message I held, saying the cipher was in the right-hand drawer of his table.

Looking over the document I found it was from the Secretary of State to the Viceroy, making suggestions about the two divisions for France, and making proposals regarding what officers from India, on leave in England, should be allowed to remain, and who must return immediately. Scanning this part with feverish haste, I read the following words, which are for ever burned into my brain: ". . . I am sure your Lordship will agree with me that all officers holding staff appointments in India must return at once." That seemed to cook my goose, but I had no time to think, for there was the telegram to be enciphered.

Now, while coming up the India Office stairs, I thought I saw near the top a man called Torrie,¹ brigade-major to the cavalry brigade at Lucknow, and that he appeared to be hastening to avoid me. Looking round, the way he had gone, his nose—which was abnormally large—was distinctly visible round a pillar. Approaching it, I found no one there, but the nose again appeared behind a further pillar. Feinting on one side while quickly moving to the other, I bumped into Torrie, and asked him what on earth he was playing at.

He explained that he was temporarily employed at the War Office, and expected to be sent over to Belgium immediately. That he had come to draw some money, but was in mortal dread of meeting his brigadier, General Cookson, who had been wiring everywhere to find him. That, if successful, the general would certainly put a stop to his War Office work and drag him out to India, whence we had all been warned to be ready to start. This, then, was the reason for the game of hide-and-seek, and, imploring me to tell no one, Torrie disappeared down a corridor leading Heaven knows where.

While enciphering the wire, the door opened and Cookson's head appeared. Seeing me instead of Sir Edmund he asked what I was doing there, and being told, began about Torrie, saying he could get no news of him at all. That he wanted to get out to India at once, as he was sure his brigade of cavalry would go to France, but he must

¹ A major in the 26th Light Cavalry, later temporary O.C. 1st Life Guards—killed in the war.

have his brigade-major. Muttering something, I went on with my work and Cookson disappeared. To the best of my knowledge, neither of us ever set eyes on poor Torrie again. He was, I believe, in Belgium very shortly afterwards.

It is interesting to add that the two divisions detailed for the Indian Corps were not the 3rd (Lahore) and 7th (Meerut) which eventually went to France, but the 3rd and 6th (Poona). The change was made at the instance of Lord Kitchener, who, not knowing them, did not believe in Mahrattas, whereby he did them a great injustice, for their record in Mesopotamia and elsewhere surprised many, and was second to none.

I had just finished the enciphering when Sir Edmund returned. Opening my own case, as soon as I could, I got no change whatever! Indeed, when persisting, I was met with the curt remark that it would be very inadvisable, in my own interest, to press the matter any further, and that I would sail in the *Dongola* on the 11th August. This I was determined I would *not* do, for my divisional commander being also at home on leave, I had made up my mind before that, if I really had to go, I would sail with him in the P. & O. ship *Multan*, in which he was to embark on the 7th August.

But I was to make one more futile effort. Lord Kitchener was the Colonel-in-Chief of my old regiment, the 7th Gurkhas, and had selected me, as C.O., to raise the 2nd battalion. Going to see FitzGerald next day, I asked him to get me an interview. Here again I had no luck, for although "K." received me quite nicely, I no sooner mentioned my wish and begged for his help with the India Office than he got quite cross, and told me he had received so much obstruction from the hands of the officials there that he would ask nothing more.

So the *Multan* it was, and a regular nightmare of a voyage, for everyone felt he was going the wrong way. When starting off to confirm our passages, I met my divisional commander, who upset our calculations a good deal by saying: "You can't take your wife. I've been told I can't take mine." This was most awkward, and all the way to the P. & O. steamship office I pondered over what I could do. By the time I got there the best plan seemed to be to take the booking official into my confidence,

after judiciously sounding him about ladies' passages to India.

He had not heard of any restrictions, but said of course they might come later. To avoid trouble, I persuaded him to put my wife down on the list as "Mrs. Wood-Smith," of Australia, while allowing our cabin tickets to remain unaltered. This was all right at first, and during the voyage I forgot all about it. An unfortunate lapse, for at Aden we transhipped into the S.S. *Salsette*. Finding the new steward removing my baggage out of our cabin, I stopped him doing so at once, and he walked off. Returning shortly, he asked me to speak to the purser, and going to his office, I was confronted with the charge of forcing myself into Mrs. Wood-Smith's cabin! The matter took quite a lot of clearing up, for there were no passports in those days, and finally I had to call in my divisional commander to identify us!

Going up the gangway of the *Multan*, I was deprived of the gun-case in my hand, on the grounds that immediate sinking would follow capture, if any arms were found on board. Being an expensive gun, its loss was a consideration, so, going to the captain, I asked for an assurance that he would not sail without me, while I went back to find someone to take it to London. The result was permission to put it on board, which it only took me a few minutes to promulgate to everyone, for the quay was full of officers, gun-cases in hand, running about to find an agent to take them over.

The India Office had given me a mass of secret documents for Aden and India, with strict orders to sink them in the sea if we were captured. I handed some over to the captain, but the most important he absolutely refused to take. Lashing them to a small crowbar, for speedy submersion, the purser was persuaded to put them into his safe. He promised in an emergency and in case of my own demise to sink them himself.

We had over seventy officers of the Egyptian Service on board, many without berths. Also returning to his country *incognito*, Prince George of Greece, whom it took those interested many days to identify. We were daily assured by some inquisitive lady or other that So-and-so "was *really* the Prince." He would not have been flattered at some of the representations.

At Port Said we saw Major (now Brigadier-General) Crauford, Gordon Highlanders, who had laid his hands on eight German Hausa Line steamers. His official appointment was, I believe, that of censor!

Amongst the Egyptian officials was the Sirdar, Sir Reginald Wingate, and the late Lord Edward Cecil, the Financial Adviser. From them we gathered the following illuminating account of Kitchener's visit to Dover, a few days before, when about to return to Egypt, with his staff, on board a destroyer.

What I gathered was that when the train reached Dover, K. received a message on the platform to say he was wanted on the telephone by Mr. Asquith. "Damn Mr. Asquith," said K. "I'll have nothing more to do with that Government. They are a lot of haverers, and I hate haverers."

It was only after much persuasion that he eventually consented to enter the telephone box, and then his remarks, bawled out in a loud voice, could be heard all over the station.

This is possibly the origin of the report, so commonly believed, that Mr. Asquith was very adverse to the appointment of Lord Kitchener as Secretary of State for War. That indeed he actually pressed him to take a joint Under-Secretaryship with Lord Haldane, while he himself retained the War Office portfolio. K., however, would accept nothing but the post of unrestricted War Secretary, with a seat in the Cabinet, and eventually he got his way. Coming out of the box, somewhat ruffled and red in the face, he snapped out an order for a "special" back to London.

Late at night on the 5th August, having a look at the tape in the club hall, on the way to bed, I had seen it tapping out: "Lord Kitchener has been appointed Secretary of State for War." So great was my delight that, inadvertently, I went upstairs humming loudly, and continued to do so as I began to undress. The door opening, a figure, in pyjamas, appeared and, with hand on hip:

"Are you *obliged* to make that noise?" it asked.

A burst of laughter, I was so tickled, was my first rejoinder, hastening to add, as wrath was gathering:

"Indeed I am. It is very inconsiderate of me, I allow, and I apologise, but I've just seen the tape record that Kitchener has been made Secretary of State for War."

To my astonishment the figure drew itself up to "Attention," saluted and, saying, "Hurrah! I entirely forgive you," disappeared.

As it was the next room door that closed, I looked him up, and found he was a naval commander; but I forget the name.

On the *Multan* we were not in as bad straits as on the *Dongola*, which sailed for India on the 11th August with about one thousand three hundred officers, who had great difficulty in getting meals, and were so inextricably mixed up that it took ten days to get a list of them made out. Arriving at Southampton, the officers saw about half a mile of their luggage stacked on the quay with no porters to handle it.

My friend, Major-General Sir Godfrey Williams, the Director-General of Military Works, told me that they had to put it on board themselves. That, while staggering up the gangway amongst a crowd of officers carrying their own baggage, with a suit-case in one hand and a heavy kit-bag held on the other shoulder, he was forced into the man in front of him by the crush behind. This man, turning his head as much as he was able, called out angrily:

"To hell with your pushing, sir, do you know I'm a major-general?"

To which Godfrey replied in great wrath: "To hell yourself, for I happen to be a major-general too!"

Evidently these officers also felt they were going the wrong way!

The S.S. *Mullan* reached Bombay on 29th August, 1914, and my divisional commander, the A.D.C., and myself proceeded at once to our destination, Lucknow. My general, however, only stayed there a few days, being moved up to command the northern army vice General Sir James Willcocks, given the Indian Army Corps on the Western Front. Entirely lost as I felt without him, and impossible as it was to get overseas, my promotion very shortly afterwards, as deputy adjutant-general (additional) army headquarters, with the rank of brigadier-general, was very welcome.

Joining immediately, it appeared my appointment would keep me in Simla during the winter, as head of the adjutant-general's branch there, while army headquarters took up its cold weather residence in Delhi. In addition to

being director of personal services, with much other detail of discipline and administration to attend to, my most important task was the organisation, and future conduct, of all arrangements for "enemy subjects" in India of *military* age. This included those who were residential and those, many being combatants, captured on the sea and in East Africa, Mesopotamia, Persia, etc.

The undertaking seemed a truly formidable one, not only because it comprised the framing of rules and regulations as regards their apprehension, internment, location and treatment; but also because none of us had the very vaguest notion of the correct procedure, nor had we any former experience to guide us. The "military age" varied according to nationality, and in some countries priests and medicals were deemed to be exempt, while in others they were not, e.g. Germans and Austrians. All "enemy subjects" who were above or below military age—including all women and children—were dealt with by the civil authorities.

After a short time, with work at a very high pressure, chaos was relieved, but we were always having to increase our accommodation. At first Ahmednagar, near Poona, in the Bombay Presidency, was the selected spot, for those of military age as well as others, but as this place got filled up, those under the civil authorities were moved to the Fort at Belgaum, where there were many houses and very good quarters.

As Turkish prisoners arrived, I had to think of some other locality, as it would have been inadvisable to incarcerate them near a Mahomedan population. Burma was selected, and at Thayetmyo, Meiktela, etc., we had eventually over ten thousand.

It was surprising the amount of money the Germans had. Many of course were business men in the large cities. The commandant at Ahmednagar wrote to me early in the war to say that the large sums in their possession, and the heavy remittances coming to them, were a source of danger. By permission of the Postmaster-General I got any limit for deposits in the local post office withdrawn entirely, and the money put in there, no prisoner being allowed more than fifty rupees in his possession at one time. Eventually the assets of all "enemy subjects" were taken over and disposed of by Government.

Getting authentic information from the South of India that members of the Basil Mission were communicating with the S.S. *Emden*, and were also reviling the Government habitually to the natives, I ordered the internment of fifty-two at Ahmednagar. Amongst these were German Jesuit priests and doctors who, being of military age, came under my jurisdiction as liable for enemy service.

The Home Member however thought otherwise and, being impeached by him, I had the honour of a special citation on paper before the Members of Council up to the Viceroy, but was saved by Sir Beauchamp Duff's note, running: "I only wish he had interned the whole lot. B. D." When the case came down again, through the Council, as is the rule in the case of contradictory noting, the Home Member wrote: "After the remarks of His Excellency the Army Member, I do not wish to press the case any further"!

More than four long years afterwards, when inspecting the Ahmednagar internment camps as G.O.C. Poona Division, I came across these men standing by their cots at "Attention," the priests in beautiful white garments, well got up and splendidly starched. I must confess I felt sorry for them living all those years behind barbed wire, and wondered whether they had any idea that the general going round was the very one responsible for their incarceration!

Under our care, however, the prisoners in India were exceedingly well treated, and, reading the account of the recent Leipzig Tribunal, one marvels at the psychology of a nation that could not only countenance, and practise, every form of brutality towards helpless fellow-creatures, but even maintain later that there was every justification for doing so. These people even got the daily newspaper. This I had tabooed, but was overruled. All those who would give parole were allowed to go anywhere within a ten-mile limit, while married ones, on parole, or not judged dangerous, lived with their wives in special barracks.

When visiting Burma I was much struck with over ten thousand Turkish prisoners of war from Mesopotamia, etc. Most of the men were exceedingly fine fellows, vigorous, lusty and well set up, while many of the officers impressed me most favourably. An army comprised of such material, *and well led*, should be invincible.

In the early part of 1915 the attempts of seditionists to

tamper with the allegiance of the Indian Army, following the return of the Sikh immigrants refused admission into Canada, caused some serious rioting at Budge Budge, near Calcutta. The trouble was undoubtedly instigated by the Ghadr¹ party, and achieving some success in certain quarters ultimately resulted in a number of executions.

A new brigade recently formed at Delhi becoming vacant about this time, I was ordered from Simla, with less than twelve hours' notice, to take command, as the central investigation department had information of increased activity amongst this Ghadr party, with, possibly, further attempts on the person of the Viceroy.

Arriving at 6 a.m. it seemed the first thing to do was to find out the arrangements for internal security. To my amazement practically none existed, in spite of the most gloomy reports given me by officials of the above-mentioned department, whom I visited at once. Incredible as it may seem, it is a fact that although there were nearly four hundred able-bodied Britishers employed as clerks, etc., in the Secretariat situated in the civil lines, Britishers who were all trained volunteers and many of them old soldiers—yet their rifles, and the ammunition, were kept two miles off in the Fort, to get to which you had to cross the railway, and skirt the confines of the city itself!

It did not take many hours to put this right and, besides evolving a practical scheme, to place four hundred rifles and a supply of ammunition under a guard in the Secretariat buildings. Then came the security and employment, in case of emergency, of the troops cantoned and camped beyond the Ridge close to Viceregal Lodge.

Riding round the various barracks and encampments it was evident that in some cases there was an entire lack of adequate protection. The latest reports pointing to sudden attacks by bombs on quarter guards from concealed vantage spots made me anxious to provide a good system of observation, without, if possible, increasing the number of armed sentries. Orders were therefore given for "flying sentries" (observation men with a definite area, carrying sticks only) to be posted where necessary. Hereby hangs a tale denoting the extraordinary way false rumours can gain credence, and how impossible it is to anticipate them.

¹ See Chapter xxi., page 283. N.B.—The root meaning of Ghadr is "treachery."

The back of the gunners' camp on the edge of a deep ravine, separating them from the lines of the Indian cavalry regiment, being one of the weak spots, I sent for my C.R.A. (Colonel L. A. Smith) to tell him to order the battery commander concerned to put a flying sentry there. I repeated to him, in confidence, what I had just learnt about the probable action of the malcontents, which made the nullah a likely hiding place.

Next day I was called up by Lord Hardinge's military secretary (Frankie Maxwell) on our private connection, saying the Viceroy wanted to know whether I had given any orders lately about protection in the artillery lines. Explaining that I had, he asked if I could remember exactly what was said, and I gave him an account, as above. Telling me he would call up later, he rang off.

Sending for Smith again, he repeated to me his words to the battery commander, which were just what I had told him, including a remark that the nullah which ran between the artillery and Indian cavalry lines must be continually watched. Towards evening Maxwell called me up once more to say the Viceroy was perfectly satisfied. "Satisfied about what?" I asked, when he explained as follows:

The battery commander (the late Lord Suffolk), when returning to quarters, hinted to his wife that there was pending trouble with the Indian cavalry regiment, which might mutiny at any moment, and he had been ordered to put extra sentries in that direction. The lady, being a friend of the Viceroy, went to him to ask if she ought to send her children home, telling him what she had just heard. Hence the telephonic enquiry!

"His Excellency added," said Maxwell, "that he wished to God husbands would not babble to their wives!"

The Delhi Brigade had evidently been hastily formed, for a more peculiar composition could hardly be imagined. Besides Delhi itself, I was charged with the administration and training of all troops in Dehra Dun, Agra, Bareilly, Chakrata, Landour, etc., but not Ranikhet and Chubbattia; and this with only one brigade major to assist me! There was a Territorial battalion in Delhi, Agra and Bareilly respectively, and although it was well on in March before I could get away to the last two, it was insisted on that all should be subjected to a "Kitchener test," in a somewhat modified form.

No orders could be obtained regarding my summer headquarters, so when the Viceroy left Delhi I packed up and transferred the office to Dehra Dun which was much cooler. There the ever vexed question of house accommodation came up and not a bungalow fit to live in could be found. Eventually I came across a delightful house designed by Lord Curzon for the commandant of the Imperial Cadet Corps. A diplomatic letter to the Foreign Department pointing out that, as the cadet corps had been dispersed, I should much like to live in it, resulted in the necessary permission, at a very moderate rental.

For the benefit of those who do not know Dehra Dun in the United Provinces, the permanent home of the 2nd and 9th Gurkhas, and situated on the south side of the large hill station of Mussoorie (6,500 feet above sea-level), it may be stated that it is perhaps one of the most beautiful and delightful places in India, outside Kashmir. Rather hot, of course, from the end of May to September, and somewhat unhealthy in the latter month, still, being only fourteen miles from Mussoorie, a pleasant change can be easily obtained. With unrivalled advantages for polo, shooting and fishing, and with a bracing cold weather climate, is it any wonder it is such a favourite spot?

It was during my tenure of this command that I got to know Lord Hardinge, my eighth Viceroy. Both at Delhi and at Dehra Dun he was kindness itself to both of us. The recollection of his handsome presence, courteous manners and dauntless courage in carrying on in most difficult times, and after a dastardly attempt on his life, which nearly proved fatal, can never be effaced.

I was dining with him at Dehra Dun when he received the news by cable of the naval attempt to force the Dardanelles. He was extremely angry at the futile effort. The blue veins swelled in his forehead, and he appealed to me to back him up in his assertion that it was pure madness. I replied that we soldiers had always been taught the principle that naval action must be fruitless unless adequately supported by land forces, which pleased him immensely.

Those were happy days in the beautiful Doon with our beloved son beside us in the 2nd Gurkhas. Days, however, which were destined to be all too short. Since my return to India I had been worrying the military secretary on every opportunity to get me overseas. I now made another

attempt, pleading, for the hundredth time, my extraordinary ill-luck about ever getting on service.

The reply I got was that—as far as could be seen—I was likely to remain at Dehra Dun for the duration of the war! This being so, and the house being an excellent one, we collected all our belongings from Quetta, Lucknow, Calcutta, etc., unpacked everything, put up heads and skins in the hall, got a big flagstaff erected on the lawn, and issued invitations for our first Dehra dinner party. Hardly had these been posted, however, when a wire came saying I was transferred to command the Abbottabad Brigade, and should join as soon as possible!

At first, this was rather a shock, until the thought came that in reality Sir Beauchamp Duff was doing me a good turn by this transfer to the North-West Frontier. The Abbottabad brigade synchronised with the 3rd war brigade, so if there was any trouble on the frontier I should take the field under my old friend Sir Frederick Campbell commanding the 1st (Peshawar) Division. The trouble was not long in coming.

As we were preparing to move I was called up on the telephone by the acting divisional commander to ask who I suggested should succeed me at Dehra. My senior colonel was a Territorial officer, the Earl of Radnor, commanding the 1/4th Wiltshire Regiment, and of whose military capabilities I had a high opinion. Naming him at once the query came through asking if I realised that he was a Territorial? My reply was: "Yes, but what's that got to do with it? He is a good soldier, has knowledge of men, much sympathy and great common sense; therefore, in my opinion, eminently qualified." I'm glad to say he was appointed, and I handed over to him a few days later.