

CHAPTER IV

THE DUFFERINS AT SIMLA

SOLON was dull—very dull—especially as my sporting friend Major Sheringham had gone off on six months' shooting leave. Some two months later I was allowed to follow him, and meanwhile Simla itself was to be avoided as the centre of poodle-faking which was abhorrent to me. Nothing would have made me willingly go near it. Imagine then my horror when I was *ordered* up, with a field officer and a captain, to represent the battalion at the 24th of May (Queen's birthday) levee and birthday ball.

It was there I met my first Viceroy, Lord Ripon. My recollections of him are a stout little man with a beard and eyeglass; who, after the levee, moved freely amongst his guests at Peterhoff¹ whilst they consumed, myself included, large quantities of champagne, quail-in-aspic, *pâté-de-foie-gras*, etc. He did not seem very popular, and I have some sort of vague recollection of the dislike we had for him and Sir Courtney Ilbert,² his Legal Member of Council, for trying to pass a measure called "The Ilbert Bill."³

¹ Formerly the Simla residence of the Viceroy before the present Viceregal Lodge was built, and now allotted to the Legal Member of Council.

² Afterwards Clerk of House of Commons, 1902-20.

³ To amend the code of criminal procedure 1882, and named after the Member who introduced it. It proposed to remove the bar by which native magistrates were precluded from exercising jurisdiction over European British subjects.

The matter is of peculiar interest at the present moment, because it undoubtedly started that racial antagonism which is so dangerous a feature of to-day. Indeed, the bill created such a ferment, especially in the East of India amongst the planters on one side and, the

So strong was the feeling over this that the wilder spirits among the indigo planters of Bihar had decided, so rumour had it, to try and kidnap the Viceroy and convey him out to sea in the vicinity of the Andamans until he saw the error of his ways.

However, he and Lady Ripon were very munificent hosts. With plenty of money at their disposal, they set an example of lavish entertainment which was somewhat hard on their successors, blessed with very much less adequate means. In those days the Governor-General, Governors, and even Lieutenant-Governors, held levees in the name of the Queen with very much the same ceremonial, even to the consecutive pens, or barriers, as at St. James's Palace. Bill Beresford, acting as Lord Chamberlain, read out the name of each person as he came up and before he made his bow.

Putting up at an hotel and dining there, I remember being extremely uncomfortable at the function, for the only conveyance of any kind I could get to take me to Peterhoff was a palanquin. This is a kind of bed with prolonged poles carried by four men who shook me up and down in the most unmerciful fashion as they shuffled along.

The next summer I was participating again at another Simla levee and birthday ball. This time the visit was spent in a nice house, was responsible for a change of opinion as regards the attractions of the place, and finally resulted, two years later, in my marriage to the eldest daughter of the Commissioner of Inland Revenue.

Lord Dufferin was the new Viceroy—my second—and combining, as he did, a charming personality, mature judgment and a kind heart with the manner of a grand seigneur, was one of the best of Governors-General. He appeared really to like doing nice things, and many such acts are easily recalled.

To the writer he was always particularly kind. The day Bengalis on the other, as entirely to destroy the mutual trust and cordiality which had been gradually built up since the Mutiny.

It was referred to local administrations for their views, and its utility is best summed up by the terse endorsement written by a district officer in Madras: "Probably quite innocuous, but at any rate entirely unnecessary." A compromise was eventually reached by which European British subjects could claim trial by a jury, at least half the members of which were to be Europeans. This is the law in India to-day.

after my engagement was announced, we happened to go to a small dance at Peterhoff. Lord Dufferin spotted us in the Lancers and, leaving his partner, walked across the room to shake hands and make his congratulations. Now subalterns like that kind of thing from a Viceroy.

On another occasion when Horace Hayes, the horse trainer and vet., was giving an exhibition of horse taming at Anandale,¹ I took a long walk, not caring to pay a gold mohr (sixteen rupees) to see it. Below the present Viceregal Lodge I met the Viceroy walking with his Persian instructor, who always accompanied him. "Hullo," he said, "why not at Anandale?" Telling him I thought sixteen rupees was a great deal too much to pay for a show I could see any day in a remount depot for nothing, he took me by the arm and said I was to go with him. Very interesting it proved to be, for during the walk down he told me all sorts of stories about other countries, and at the exhibition displayed a knowledge of horses I had not dreamt he possessed.

He could be quite *acid*, though, when necessary. I was near once when a lady said to him she had been walking over the new Viceregal Lodge that afternoon, which she described as "the new palace you are building." "Palace," said Lord Dufferin, "it is only a modest house that any country squire might aspire to."

At a fancy dress ball there, given as a house warmer, we were received by His Excellency and Lady Dufferin, the Viceroy wearing ordinary *dress clothes*, with Orders and his G.C.S.I. sash. About half-way through, I was dancing with a Mrs. Langtry (wife of the C.O. of the 8th Hussars), who was looking particularly well that night. At the end of the music and as we were walking away, up came an Arab and began to talk.

"Oh! Come along, never mind that old Arab," I said rather irritably. "He's thinking of 'Lillie Langtry,' his donkey at Port Said."

As she didn't budge, though still holding my arm, but seemed embarrassed, I looked more closely at the intruder, and recognised Lord Dufferin! There was nothing for it but to leave them to proceed to *my* "Kālī jagah" (dark,

¹ A recreation ground, formed by cutting away the hillside, and situated below the residential part of Simla. Much enlarged in later years, mainly by the energy and zeal of Lord William Beresford.

sitting-out place!) together, while I took solace in a drink! 'There is no doubt His Excellency was a great ladies' man. A good tale is told of how, assembling his personal staff soon after his first arrival in India, he explained his wishes regarding ceremonial functions and the attention necessary to all guests at Government House. "I want you to quite understand," he said, "that I expect you to devote your energies to the elderly ladies. You need not trouble about the young and pretty ones, I will look after them myself!"

For some years the Dufferins had a cousin, Miss Thynne, out in India with them, and in the chronicles of their movements one always read in the papers: "His Excellency the Viceroy, with Lady Dufferin and the Honourable Miss Thynne, and attended by, etc., etc." Lady Dufferin rode a mule at Simla, as being safer, and this was stabled at Viceregal Lodge. The mule, a very big and specially selected one, was provided by a mountain battery at Jutogh, four miles from Simla, and the men there, on account of its employment, had christened it "The Begum." At the end of the season two gunners, sitting one day on a wall just outside the Cantonment of Jutogh, saw the mule being led back to the battery and in very bad condition. Said No. 1:

"I say, Bill, 'ere's 'The Begum' coming back."

"'Begum,' you say," remarked No. 2, "I should call it the honourable Miss Thin!"

Lady Dufferin caused it to be announced that it was quite impossible for her to get to know people if they simply wrote their names in the Viceregal books and then ran away. Further, that she, with Lady Helen Blackwood, would be At Home from twelve to two twice a week, and that callers were expected to come inside. This meant a morning-coat for us, besides a terrifying ten minutes in a drawing-room, and great was the tribulation.

However, it had to be done, and punctually at noon the next Tuesday I entered the portals. But there was nothing terrifying at all. Happening to hit off a shooting trip I had made in the Himalayas the year before, my ten minutes lengthened into twenty, and it was only the arrival of a whole batch of people which stopped my tongue. After that I always seemed to be quite at home at Peterhoff and thoroughly enjoyed going there, which was very often.

Many short visits were paid to Simla that season. One morning, asking for leave to "sleep out" and return next day, which was Thursday and in India a *dies non*, the adjutant told me I couldn't go at all as the colonel had decided I was not to be allowed to visit Simla any more. Utterly mystified, I asked why, and then discovered that the C.O. thought I was getting what he called "entangled," and would probably become engaged to be married and then want to go to the "Indian Staff Corps." This was a very sore point with, and anathema to, all commanding officers of British units.

I had not up to then contemplated such a thing, but in those days the only way to enter the Indian Army, then called "Indian Staff Corps," was through the British Service, under certain conditions. This was very hard on British units. Not only did they lose a number of their best officers, attracted by the glamour of an Indian career, but they frequently lost several at one and the same time, rendering the duties of those who remained very heavy until they could be replaced. This was often a matter of many months.

This refusal of sleeping-out leave was extremely awkward, as I was engaged for a lot of dances that night and had made all arrangements to go, including the deposit of my dress clothes, etc., at the Simla United Service Club.

But how was it to be done? The colonel might send for me, and he never went out until 4 p.m. He then invariably drove up the cart road away from the Simla direction, which was an advantage. The Government tonga was not allowed to start from Solon after 4 p.m. on account of arriving in the dark. Finally, I had no leave to be absent for a night!

At breakfast a brilliant thought struck me. I had two ponies and the adjutant one. He was a good fellow and a great friend; so, asking the loan of his pony for the evening, I sent off one of mine immediately to a stage nine miles away and the other to within ten miles of Simla, arranging to ride the adjutant's for the first twelve-mile portion. By this means I rode the thirty-one miles to Simla, attended the dance, and rode back in the very early morning in time for breakfast.

This I did nine times during that summer, but had to give it up in the monsoon season, for my last ride was a

dreadful nightmare. Leaving the dance about 3 a.m. in a torrential downpour, I changed at the club and started an hour later, knowing that I must be at orderly room in khaki uniform before nine. The night was pitch dark and the rain so heavy that, having with difficulty manoeuvred the Combermere Bridge below the club, I knocked up a small tailor's shop, opposite Hamilton's, the jewellers, to borrow a piece of tarpaulin to tie over my knees. The act of dismounting, of course, soaked my saddle through and through, which did not add to my comfort.

There were some oil lamps burning dimly near the post office, but past Army Head-quarters it was very dark and, moreover, my pony, hating the journey, stopped and reared at every cross-road. Down to the left below Gorton Castle I could see absolutely nothing. My mount, not being out to help me at all, made matters very difficult. It was only by reaching out with my crop to hit the railings on the left and kicking out my foot continually to feel for the wall on the right, that it was possible to tell at all how one was progressing.

Solon was eventually reached at 8.30 a.m. and I was saved. Of course everyone but the colonel knew all about it. At least I *thought* he was in ignorance, until seeing him at Lymington twenty-four years later he told me, roaring with laughter, that he also knew! Simla was much amused. Lord Dufferin, when the dance or entertainment was at Peterhoff, invariably came up and, with his head on one side and a merry twinkle in his eye, would say:

"I trust the cart road is in good order, Woodyatt!"

At this time I met my first Commander-in-Chief, in the person of Sir Donald Stewart, and a more magnificent man I had never seen. Someone told me it was the correct thing to give him a bow at levees after passing the Viceroy, and there was certainly no difficulty in spotting him, for he was head and shoulders above everyone else. His family, too, inherited his good looks, his four daughters, Mrs. Davis, Mrs. Eustace, May and Norah Stewart, being quite the belles of Simla at a time when beautiful women there were very plentiful.

A great celebrity also in the Summer Capital then was Major Dalbiac, commanding a horse battery at Ambala and commonly called "The Treasure." To a neat and handsome person was added a firm seat in the saddle, a

matchless effrontery, a marvellous capacity for making love, and some system for obtaining unlimited leave which was the bewilderment of the authorities and the envy of all his contemporaries !

At the end of July, finding I could get two or three months' leave, which I fondly hoped to spend in Simla, I approached the adjutant with my leave form. Looking it through, he explained that it was utter waste of time putting Simla in the application at all, as there was not the least chance of it being passed by the colonel !

Being also very keen to get down to Sitamarhi, in Bihar, to stay with an old school pal, my destination was altered accordingly. I begged, however, I might first go to Simla for a short time to collect my clothes, raise the wind for my journey, etc. I suppose this took me some time, for, after a fortnight or so, I got an official from the adjutant to say that if I did not leave Simla very shortly and get on to Bihar, the remainder of my leave would be cancelled ! So I had to go.

The famous Bertie Short was there, still doing a little riding and busily reporting for the *Planters' Gazette*. The first night of the lotteries my breath was taken away by the chairman, Paddy Hudson, rising to say :

"Before we commence business, gentlemen, I think it right to say that Mr. Bertie Short is amongst us, but if anyone objects he will withdraw."

* I suppose the poor fellow was a defaulter in some way ; anyhow no one objected and the selling began. His face, one not easy to forget with its good-looking oval shape, fearless blue eyes and dare-devil expression, remained quite calm and unruffled during this preliminary. Very different to what it looked next day when he was "bucked" off in the paddock by a waler pony mare on the signal to mount.