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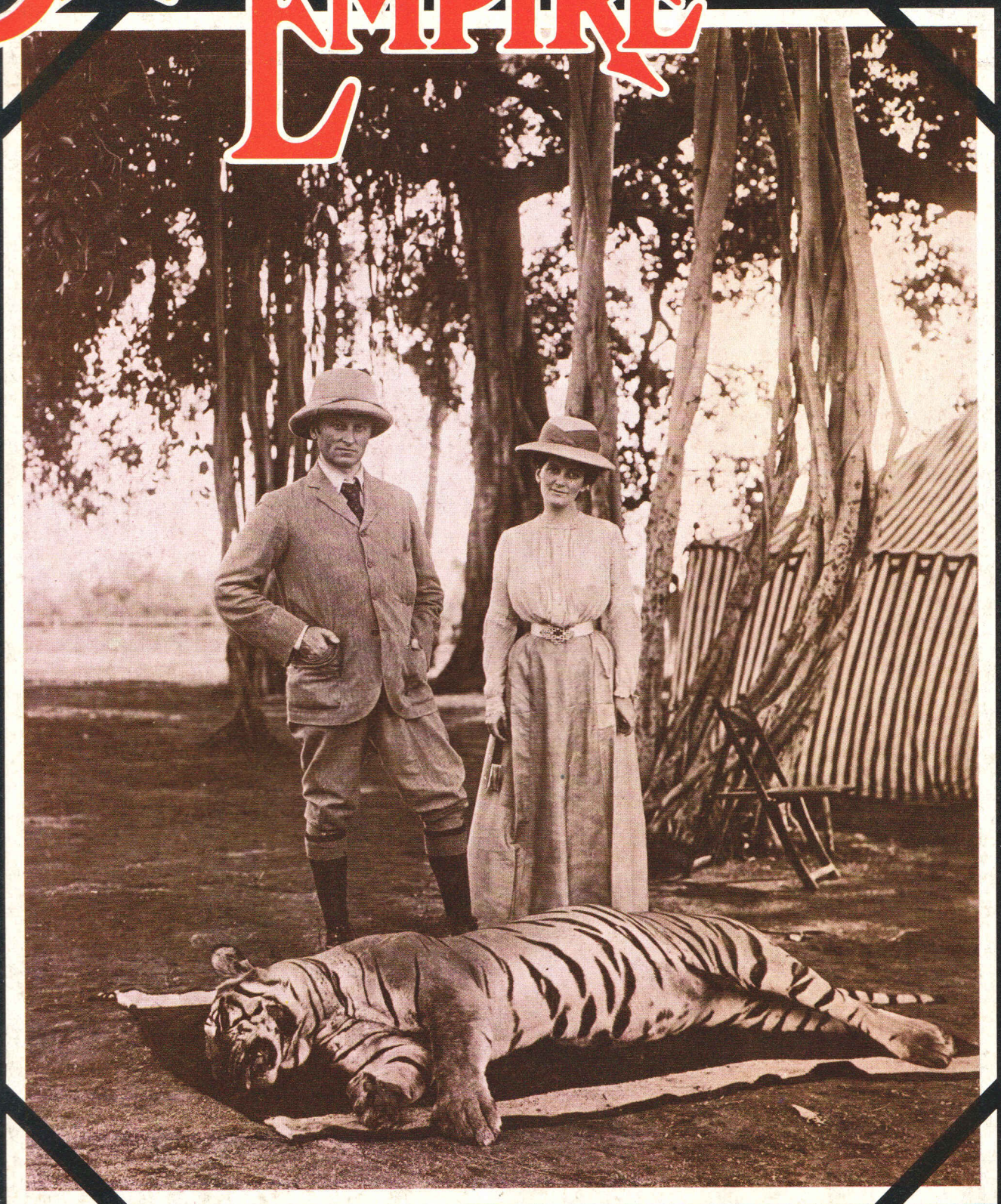

A MOST SUPERIOR PERSON

George Nathaniel Curzon, Viceroy Extraordinary

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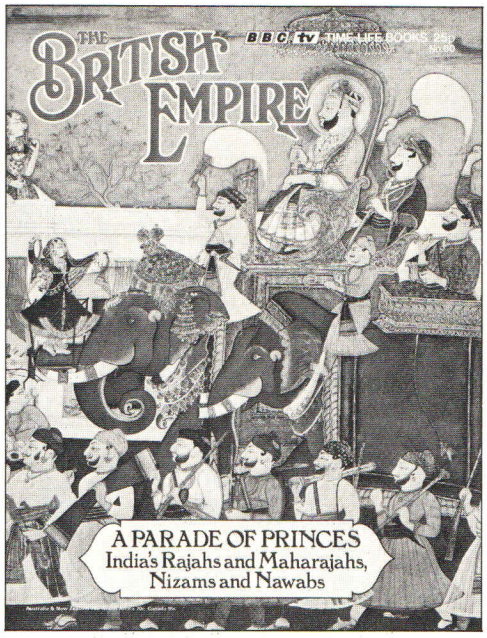

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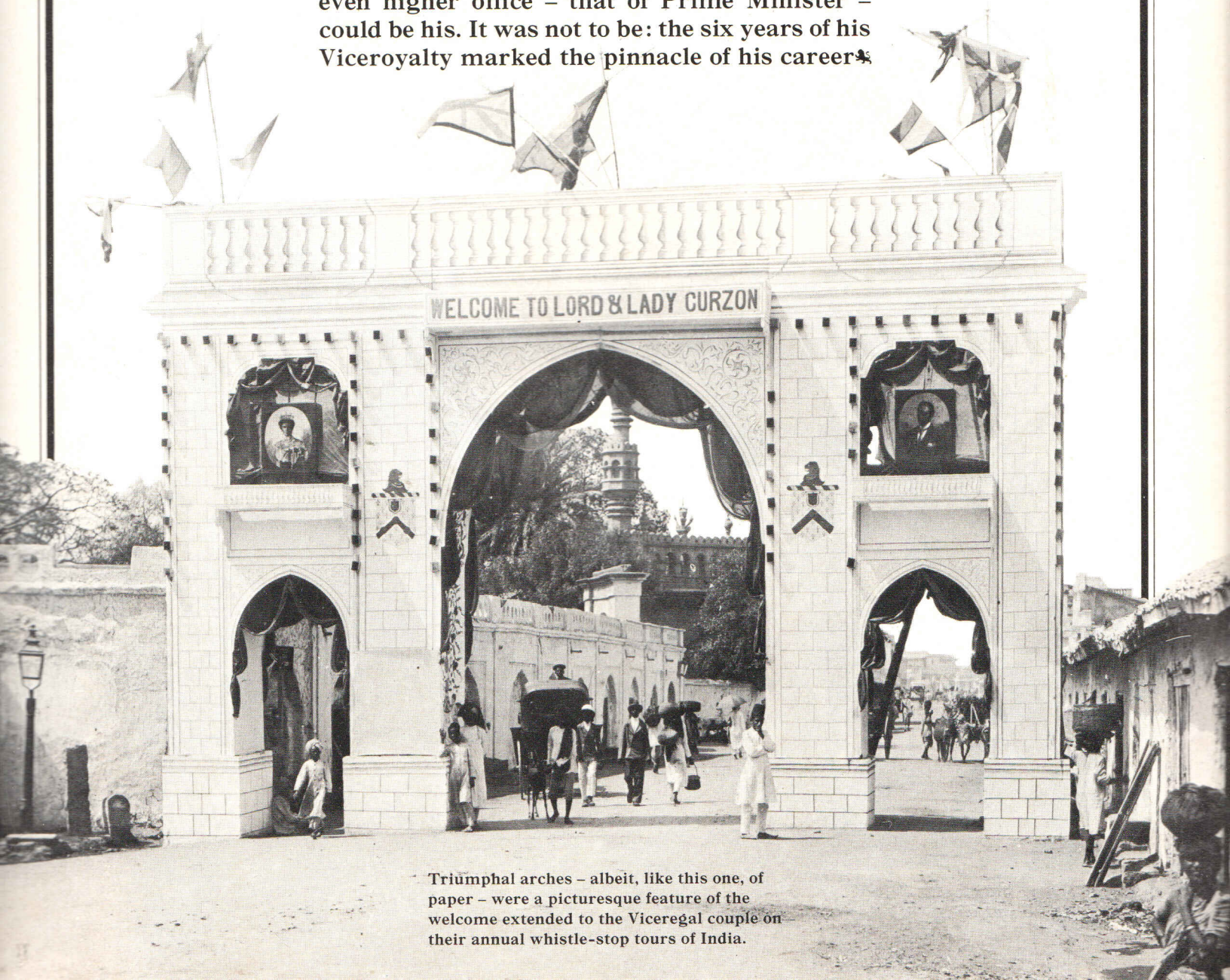
Cover: Lord and Lady Curzon show off a trophy shot on a big game hunt during a viceregal visit to the Nizam of Hyderabad in 1902.

A MOST SUPERIOR PERSON

George Curzon was only 39 when, in 1899, he satisfied a teenage ambition to become Viceroy. One of the youngest rulers of British India, he was also among the most brilliant, dynamic and original. He proved himself indeed "a most superior person" (as an undergraduate jingle once snidely described him). He believed that even higher office – that of Prime Minister – could be his. It was not to be: the six years of his Viceroyalty marked the pinnacle of his career.



Triumphal arches – albeit, like this one, of paper – were a picturesque feature of the welcome extended to the Viceregal couple on their annual whistle-stop tours of India.

By David Dilks

In the late afternoon of January 3, 1899, the state carriage bearing the incoming Viceroy of India, Lord Curzon of Kedleston, drew up before the steps of Government House, Calcutta. The city was decorated everywhere with welcoming signs and flags. The people in their tens of thousands thronged the streets and the square named after one of the most distinguished of his predecessors, Dalhousie. The viceregal bodyguard, clad in scarlet, reputedly better turned out than the Brigade of Guards, escorted the carriage. On the stairway stood the dignitaries of the British government of India in its high noontide. With them were many native princes and other distinguished Indians.

A salute of 31 guns sounded as Curzon mounted the steps. In the Council Chamber his Warrant of Appointment, signed by Queen Victoria, was read out:

"We do hereby give and grant unto you our Governor General of India and to your Council as the Governor General of India in Council, the superintendence, direction and control of the whole civil and military government with all our territories and revenues in India . . . and we do hereby order and require all our servants, officers and soldiers in the East Indies . . . to conform, submit and yield due obedience unto you and your Council."

Small wonder that Curzon should have felt a sense of fulfilled romance at that moment. The great house he was entering was modelled upon his own family home in Derbyshire. Curzon was still not 40: only Lord Dalhousie had been appointed to rule India at an earlier age; only John Lawrence of all his predecessors knew India more intimately. Whereas most Viceroys had been selected for their general good judgment and capacity, with little knowledge of the East, Curzon had prepared himself for the post from his boyhood at Eton through his undergraduate career at Oxford.

He confessed to having been haunted by a passion for India from the time when a visiting speaker told the Literary Society at Eton of an empire in the East more populous, more beneficent, and more amazing than that of Rome.

At Eton, George Curzon had taken innumerable prizes in French, Italian, English literature, Scripture, Latin, Greek and declamation. He had formidable powers of rapid assimilation; a combative nature and a love of success; more sensitivity than sensibility; a marked tendency to overwork, and a weakness of the back – in fact, a slight curvature of the spine – that was later to betray him in periods of exceptional stress. Though his academic career at Oxford was distinguished, he did not devote himself exclusively to it: he immersed himself in politics and vowed to stand for Parliament. In vain did no less a person than Ruskin upbraid him and his fellows for such preoccupations:

"My dear Sirs, what in the Devil's name have you to do either with Mr. Disraeli or Mr. Gladstone? You are students at the University and have no more business with politics than you have with rat-catching."

Even before he left Oxford, Curzon had made a high reputation as a debater, as a leader of young Conservative opinion and as a scholar. "He was at twenty-one," recalled Winston Churchill many years later, "notorious as The Coming Man." Welcome in high society for his high spirits, charm and wit, Curzon already displayed that natural taste for the magnificent, the stately and the ample that made him the subject of a famous Oxford rhyme:

My name is George Nathaniel Curzon,
I am a most superior person.
My cheek is pink, my hair is sleek,
I dine at Blenheim once a week.

The words "a most superior person" clung to Curzon. His public manner gave colour to the description; and those who felt the sharp edge of his tongue, or who envied his gifts, repeated it. Curzon himself, as he confessed in a speech nearly 50 years later, had inwardly "groaned for a lifetime under the cruel brand of an undergraduate's jibe."

He entered Parliament for Southport in 1886, attended assiduously to his many duties in the constituency and the House of Commons, laying the foundations of a successful political career. But he never intended to devote himself solely to that. His overriding interest lay in foreign affairs, particularly in Asia.

Asia possessed attractions that, for him, no other part of the world could match. It was, he used to say, a source of endless fascination and delight, a university in which the scholar never took his degree. In a series of journeys between 1887 and 1894, he visited Persia, Central Asia, Afghanistan and India itself. The man who did not know the East, he said, was not fit for statesmanship.

Curzon was sure that India was the pivot of Asian politics. Not only did her possession give the British undeniable standing, but her policy affected all the adjoining regions: Persia, Afghanistan, Tibet, Siam and still further afield.

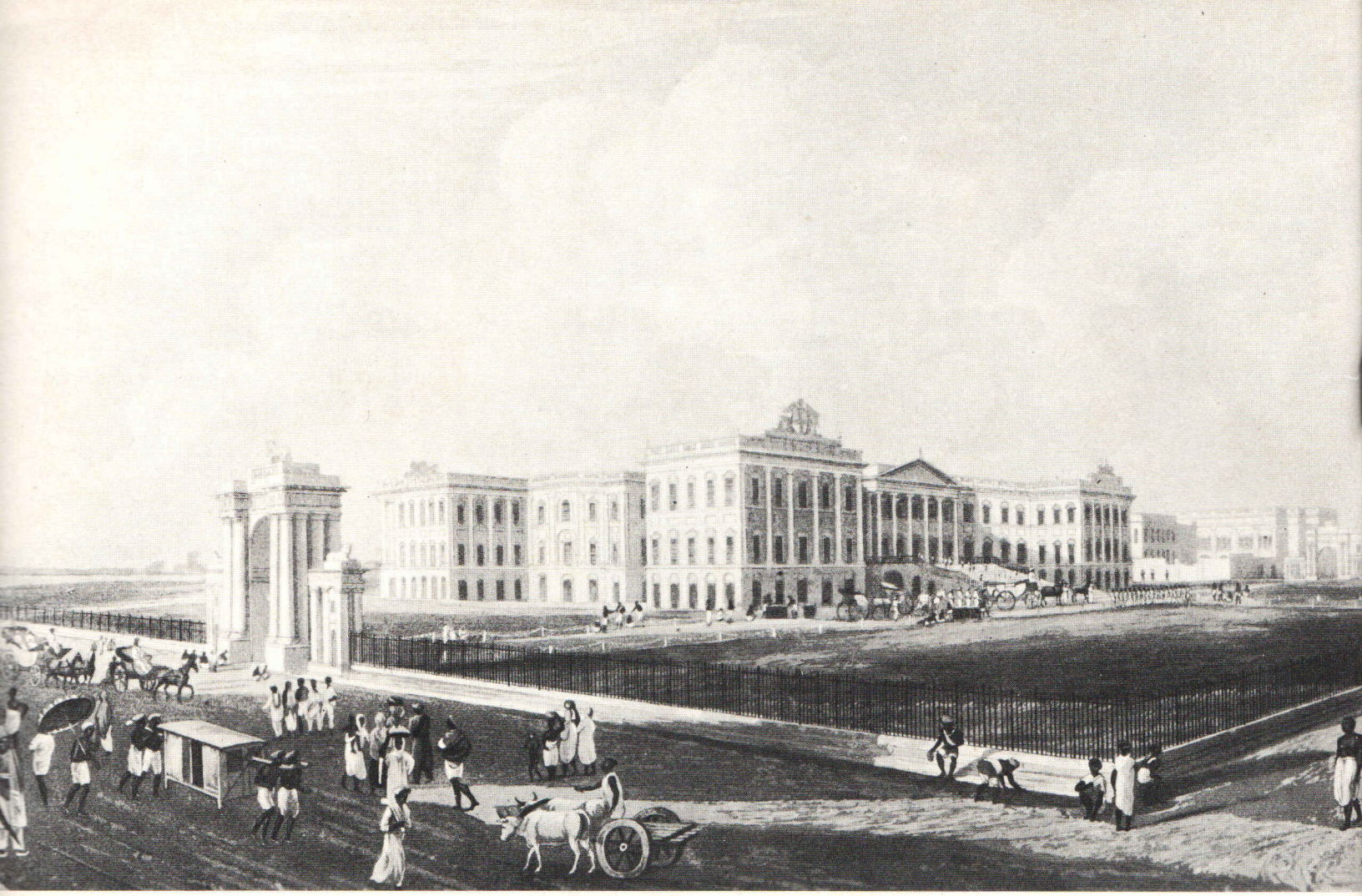
It is recorded that when he first passed through the portals of Government House, Calcutta, he vowed that the day should dawn when he would return to it, not as a guest, but as its rightful occupant. By his travels and by his books and speeches about them, Curzon established himself as one of the principal authorities on Asiatic questions. He became Under-Secretary at the India Office in 1891 until Lord Salisbury's government fell in the following year; and Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office from 1895, when Salisbury returned to power. In that post he made his parliamentary reputation. The work was murderously hard, and Salisbury's policy not always congenial to defend. Often Curzon's intimate friend, St. John Brodrick, would accompany him home, with Curzon speechless with fatigue after a long debate.

Despite his labours at home, he made ample use of the long recesses – for Parliament in those days did not normally sit between August and February – to see the great world beyond Europe, in particular the East.

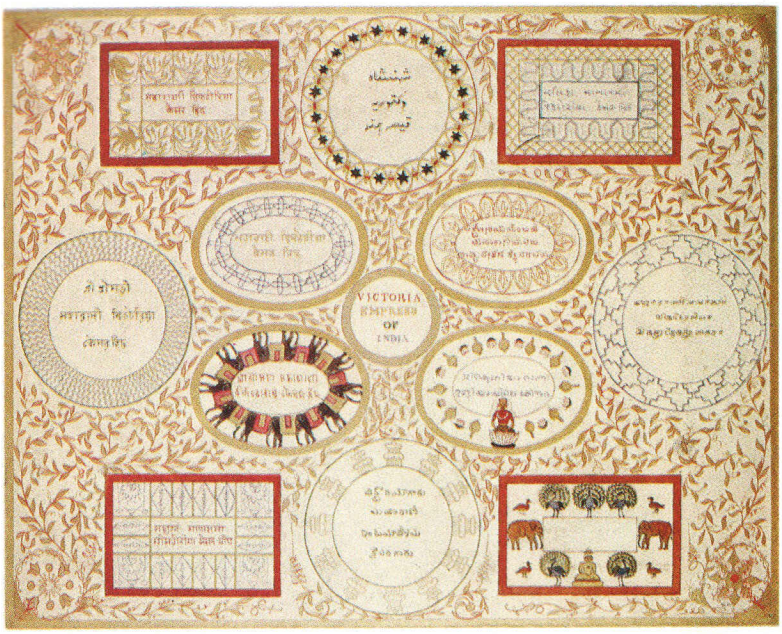
After his harsh political apprenticeship, Curzon might certainly have looked for promotion at home. Yet there was no doubt of his desire to serve in the East. He believed the Empire to be a powerful agency for good and that the British had a capacity to rule other nations justly and uprightly. "I believe a very great work can be done in India," he wrote to the Prime Minister, "by an English Viceroy who is young and active and intensely absorbed in his work . . . a good deal of energy and application would be wanted and – what very few men take to India – a great love of the country and pride in the imperial aspect of its possession."

My name is George Nathaniel Curzon,
I am a most superior person.

This jibe, written of Curzon while he was at Oxford in the 1870s, scarcely did credit to his brilliance and dedication, but it was an apt comment on his reputation for sneering intellectual arrogance, a characteristic that is apparent in his portrait (left) and the caricature below. It was also a quality that made him one of the least loved, if most respected, of the Viceroys of India.



Completed in 1803, Government House, Calcutta (above) had been modelled on the much-publicized Palladian style of the Curzon family's own home of Kedleston (below). It had been Curzon's boyhood ambition to "pass from a Kedleston in Derbyshire to a Kedleston in Bengal."



A tribute to Victoria recalls the diversity of Curzon's India. The English inscription (centre) is reiterated in 12 major Indian Empire languages (from top left) Hindi, Persian, Gujarati, Panjabi, Kanarese, Bengali, Tamil, Oriya, Malayalam, Mahrathi, Telugu and Burmese.

And again in 1898, when the time was drawing near for Lord Salisbury to make a decision on the appointment of the new Viceroy, he wrote: "It may be thought that I am too young – yet I am in my fortieth year; or too ardent – yet nothing considerable has ever been done without enthusiasm. . . . For 12 years I have worked and studied and thought, with a view – should the chance ever arise – to fitting myself for the position."

The post to which Curzon went the following year had no parallel in any other part of the British Empire. The Viceroy had to combine many of the functions of a president, a monarch, a prime minister and a foreign secretary. The business of the government of India was arranged in a pyramidal fashion, with the Viceroy himself, as Dalhousie used to say rather gloomily, the final authority in every matter from a seawall at Tumlick to a plunge-bath at Peshawar. He was expected to entertain on the grand scale; in Curzon's first month, indeed, no fewer than 3,500 meals were served to visitors or viceregal guests at Government House.

Although no Viceroy could be idle, Curzon was exceptionally industrious. He normally worked from the middle of the morning until 2 a.m. or later. His colleagues had ready access to him. He saw each week, or sometimes more frequently, the principal civil servant from each department, he made many speeches, acted as ceremonial head of the administration and received hundreds of visitors. In Curzon's time, at least, these interviews were not always formal. One chief from the North-West Frontier of India, who received to his astonishment a sharp lecture on the merits of loyalty to the government of India, reputedly left the viceregal presence "sweated and surprised."

Immeasurably fortified by his previous knowledge of India, and never lacking self-confidence, Curzon looked upon all those features which made the government of the country so problematical – its vast area, its extremes of climate, the fanaticism and turbulence of the North-West Frontier, the ancestral rivalries of the communities, the presence of so small a number of Britons governing an area the size of Europe, "a speck of foam," as he called them, "upon a dark and unfathomable ocean" – as increasing the opportunities for imaginative administration. He vowed that, although the government of India was infinitely too large a business to be run by one man, it should be superintended by one man.

All predictions that he would soon be swamped in paper were falsified. He probed into questions relentlessly, settling issues which had been dragging about the offices for years, in some instances for decades. In short, he had a highly distinctive style as a ruler, compounded of meticulous attention to detail, very rapid judgment, boldness in conception, persistence in following through reforms, capacity to kindle enthusiasm among those who were sure of themselves and to arouse resentment among those overborne by his personality or tactless language. He never dealt with a case of importance without scrutinizing its history and asking himself what would be the results of all the alternative courses. He made it his business not only to know the machine as it was but to fettle it up.

To his disappointment, he found the Indian Civil Service, although generally honest and incorruptible, deficient in initiative and ideas at the senior levels. Precedent had become a fetish instead of a guide, and tradition an incubus instead of a basis to be modified as circumstances changed. What India needed, he judged, was stimulus, encouragement, example and incentive from the top instead of a respectable presidency. The system resembled, he once wrote, a gigantic quagmire, into which every question that came along either sank or was sucked down, "and unless you stick a peg with a label over the spot at which it disappeared, and from time to time go round and dig out the relics, you will never see anything of them again."

On the face of it, India when Curzon assumed the Viceroyalty looked little different from the India of, say, 15 years before. The administration was perhaps a little slower in operation; a serious uprising on the North-West Frontier had been quelled without undue difficulty elsewhere; otherwise, 40 years of peace had elapsed since the Mutiny; trade and revenue were increasing; there was no sign of substantial discontent with British rule; hatreds between the races seemed to be slumbering; and the comparative handful of British – little more than 1,000 strong in the upper ranks of the Indian Civil Service – were, to outward appearances, in secure control.

Lord Curzon soon concluded that the appearances were misleading. He was conscious of a growing, though still small, force of nationalism which he vainly hoped to tame or deflect; he believed that many of the most vital questions had been shelved for too long; and if reform was urgently necessary, as he deemed it to be in almost every branch of Indian government, he judged that the machine must first be placed upon the anvil.

The system by which the government of India did its written business was a very peculiar one, entailing elaborate annotations by civil servants in ascending order of seniority, until the commentaries frequently exceeded the subject of commentary by three or four times in volume. The Viceroy said that it resembled a kind of literary bedlam, and this system must certainly have contrasted strongly with his recent experience at the Foreign Office, where many of the issues were settled without consultation by Lord Salisbury himself, and where commentaries upon documents were rarely written by members of the staff.

He began to investigate issues that had been left untouched for years. "I am prodding up the animal," he wrote after

continued on p. 1632

A VISIT TO THE NIZAM

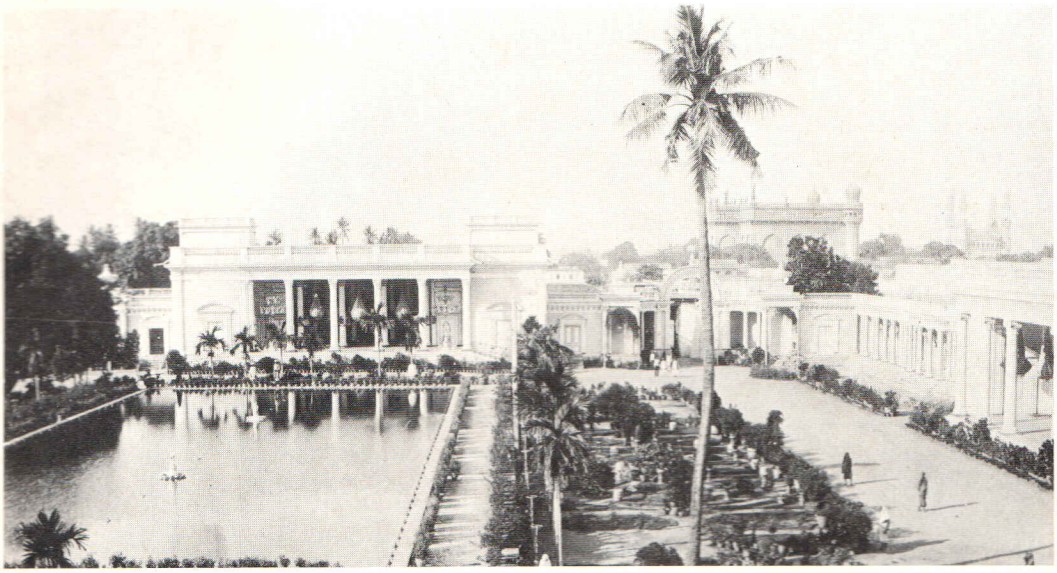
As Viceroy, Curzon was painfully aware of the irresponsibility of many Indian princes. He once complained: "Princes cannot afford, any more than Viceroys, to live exclusively in palaces – they must be out and about, setting an example to their fellow creatures."

But to instil this high ideal was a hard task: some princes were no more than drunkards, lunatics and playboys. Yet on the stability of their states – 600 in all, covering one-third of India – depended the stability of the Raj. Curzon could not, even as Viceroy, directly reprimand them, since many were regularly entertained by the British Royal Family at Windsor. His solution was to follow his own advice: he got out and about among them to bring his influence to bear.

Some of the princes demanded especially careful treatment. The Nizam of Hyderabad, for instance, was the richest man on earth and ruled an area almost the size of Great Britain. Curzon's stay with him in 1902 – the subject of the pictures on these pages – was accompanied by all the pomp and ceremony of a visit by one head of state to another.

The heavily decorated Victorian interior of one of the Nizam's palace rooms testifies to the extent of British influence. A portrait of the Queen stands on the table in the foreground.

The Nizam, seated in the centre between Lord and Lady Curzon, poses with other guests and members of his court for an official photograph.

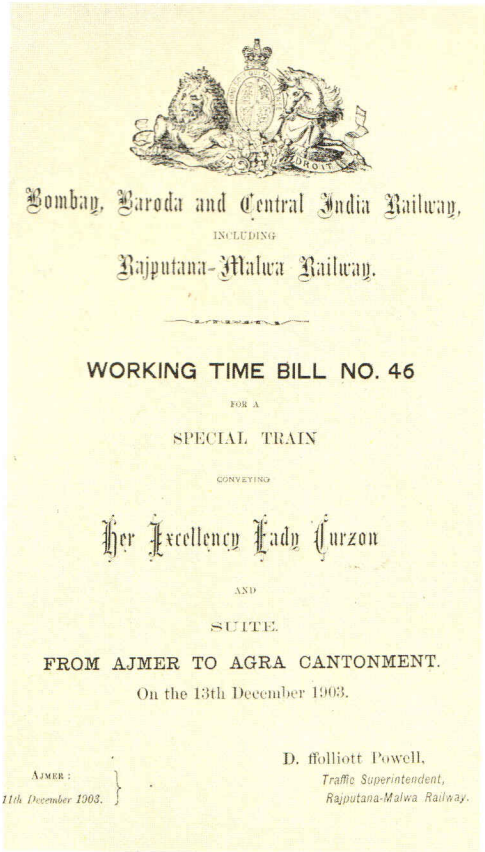


The Nizam's palace, set round an artificial lake, now delights and enthralls tourists as one of the finest examples of Victorian architecture throughout the whole of India.

Accompanying the men on a hunt, Lady Curzon in a palanquin is borne across a flooding stream by four native servants.

Lord and Lady Curzon show off their trophy after a big game hunt, an entertainment traditionally arranged by the native princes for their honoured guests.

The Nizam sports English dress, a turban, and the Star of India for this formal portrait.



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A gilt-edged train requisition commemorates Lady Curzon's 225-mile rail journey from Ajmer to Agra, south of Delhi, in 1903.

a few months in India, "with most vigorous and unexpected digs, and it gambols plaintively under the novel spur. Nothing has been done hitherto under six months. When I suggest six weeks the attitude is one of pained surprise; if six days, one of pathetic protest; if six hours, one of stupefied resignation. . . . I am regarded," Curzon concluded, "with mingled bewilderment and pain."

To initiate change in bureaucracy so highly developed could never be an easy task. The vast distances, the multiplicity of local customs and languages, the virtual independence of the governments of Bombay and Madras, the profound conservatism of the country all militated against his policies. Though his appetite for files and papers was legendary, he confessed to his Private Secretary in 1902 that under the intense pressure of business he sometimes felt as if he were going mad. He groaned at the Byzantine procedures of the departments and at the shocking dearth of ideas.

The method that Curzon followed in instituting reform was a simple but effective one. Within his first four months as Viceroy he had identified 12 main subjects calling for urgent attention. When deficiencies had been detected, expert investigation by a small commission, or sometimes by a single individual, soon followed: and then legislation or administrative action would be taken on the basis of the report.

It would take a volume to describe in detail the many reforms that Curzon encouraged or instituted. He laid down four great principles upon which the governance of India was to be conducted henceforth. First, there must be an end to drift. Every branch of the administration must have a policy derived either from reasoning or experience, laid down in clear language understood by the officers and by the people to whom it was applied. Second, the administration of India must be devoted above all to the welfare of the peasantry who constituted nearly 90 per cent of the population. Third, the government must be frank and outspoken, must take the people into open confidence as to its intentions and never mystify or deceive. Finally, and most important of all, it must look ahead not just for a year or two but with an eye to the more distant future.

Many measures – the reform of the rules governing land revenues, so that in times of dearth taxation should bear less heavily; the encouragement of commerce and industry; the revision of rules governing relief in time of famine; the increase of railway mileage by more than a quarter – could be put through promptly, despite occasional opposition from the India Office in London. Other more substantial reforms – entailing the expenditure of what then seemed large sums of public money, or with political overtones – could only be instituted more slowly: a great increase in the irrigated area, the best available safeguard against famine; the reform of the educational system; the partition, in the interest of greater administrative efficiency, of the vast province of Bengal; the reform of the police service, in which corruption was notorious.

There is probably, however, no feature of the Viceroyalty for which Curzon is more gratefully remembered nowadays than his loving attention to India's architectural heritage. From the time of his first visits to Asia, he had found the Indo-Saracenic style the most satisfying and artistic of all. The Taj Mahal, he exclaimed after his first glimpse of it in 1888, was "incomparable, designed like a palace and finished like a jewel – a snow-white emanation starting from a bed of cypresses and backed by a turquoise sky, pure,

Lord Curzon inspects a newly laid rail line. Under his administration India's rail network was increased by 6,000 miles.

Miss Mary Leiter, American socialite, became Lady Curzon in 1895. Her poise and presence earned her the nickname "The Leiter of Asia," a pun on the epithet often applied to Buddha, "The Light of Asia."

perfect and unutterably lovely. One feels the same sensation as in gazing at a beautiful woman, one who has that mixture of loveliness and sadness which is essential to the highest beauty."

It seems incredible that the government was in 1899 spending only £7,000 a year all told on the preservation of priceless buildings and historic fabrics. By the time Curzon left, that figure had reached £40,000 a year, and nearly £50,000 had been spent at Agra, "an offering of reverence to the past and a gift of recovered beauty to the future."

What Curzon did for Indian archaeology is not only of significance in itself – for many of the buildings would in a few more years have passed beyond recovery or repair – but also for the attitude that it reveals. Curzon gave short shrift to the thesis that a Christian government had no duty to preserve the monuments and sanctuaries of other faiths. Art and beauty, he retorted, and the reverence owed to everything that has evoked human genius or inspired faith, are independent of creeds. "What is beautiful, what is historic, what tears the mask off the face of the past, and helps us to read its riddles, and look it in the eyes – these, and not the dogmas of a combative theology, are the principal criteria to which we must look."

As his thoroughgoing reforms show, Curzon was essentially a working Viceroy and not a figurehead, much more often to be found in his shirt-sleeves in the office than dressed up in public.

He demanded from his subordinates complete devotion to their duties, long hours and enthusiasm, but drove himself harder than he drove them and his own enthusiasms set a fine example. One of his subordinates wrote that there was a "champagne feeling" about working for Curzon. He also carried himself and his staff along by his sense of fun, which perhaps sparkled less freely than it had done in earlier years, but could not be suppressed for long. Once, when he paid an official visit to Jaipur, the people of the state had prepared as usual a magnificent welcome. As he drove with the British Resident through the decorated streets, the carriage approached a banner stretching

across the road and inscribed "A GALA DAY." It had been made in two pieces that did not quite meet in the middle, so that it actually read "A GAL A DAY." Curzon turned instantly to the Resident and said, "Really, you must tell the people here that they have quite overestimated my powers."

Apart from his official visits, however, he, like other Viceroys of his day, had little continuous contact with distinguished Indians. Many were, of course, entertained formally at Calcutta and among some, who admired his high ideals, industry and deep love of India, he aroused admiration. Among many others, especially after the attempted reform of the universities and the abortive partition of Bengal, understandably but mistakenly taken as deliberate attacks on developing national feeling in India, he provoked reactions of anger and hostility.

But whatever else might be said of his policy, it certainly could not be described with truth as one of divide and rule; rather, it was an attempt to break down the watertight compartments into which so much of Indian life was divided and to emphasize the unifying elements in a continent where the disruptive forces were only too obvious.

The employment of Indians in the government of India increased steadily in Curzon's time and, indeed, British administration of the sub-continent would have been impossible without them. Curzon disliked and tried to arrest the attempts to turn Indians into brown Europeans and deplored the day when the British had pressed English texts upon India, so that the education of Indians in their own tongues had suffered.

Curzon was no less active in foreign affairs. The Great Game of diplomatic sparring with Russia, which had been going on for half a century, had entered into a new phase with the advance of Russia's strategic railways southwards towards the borders of India.

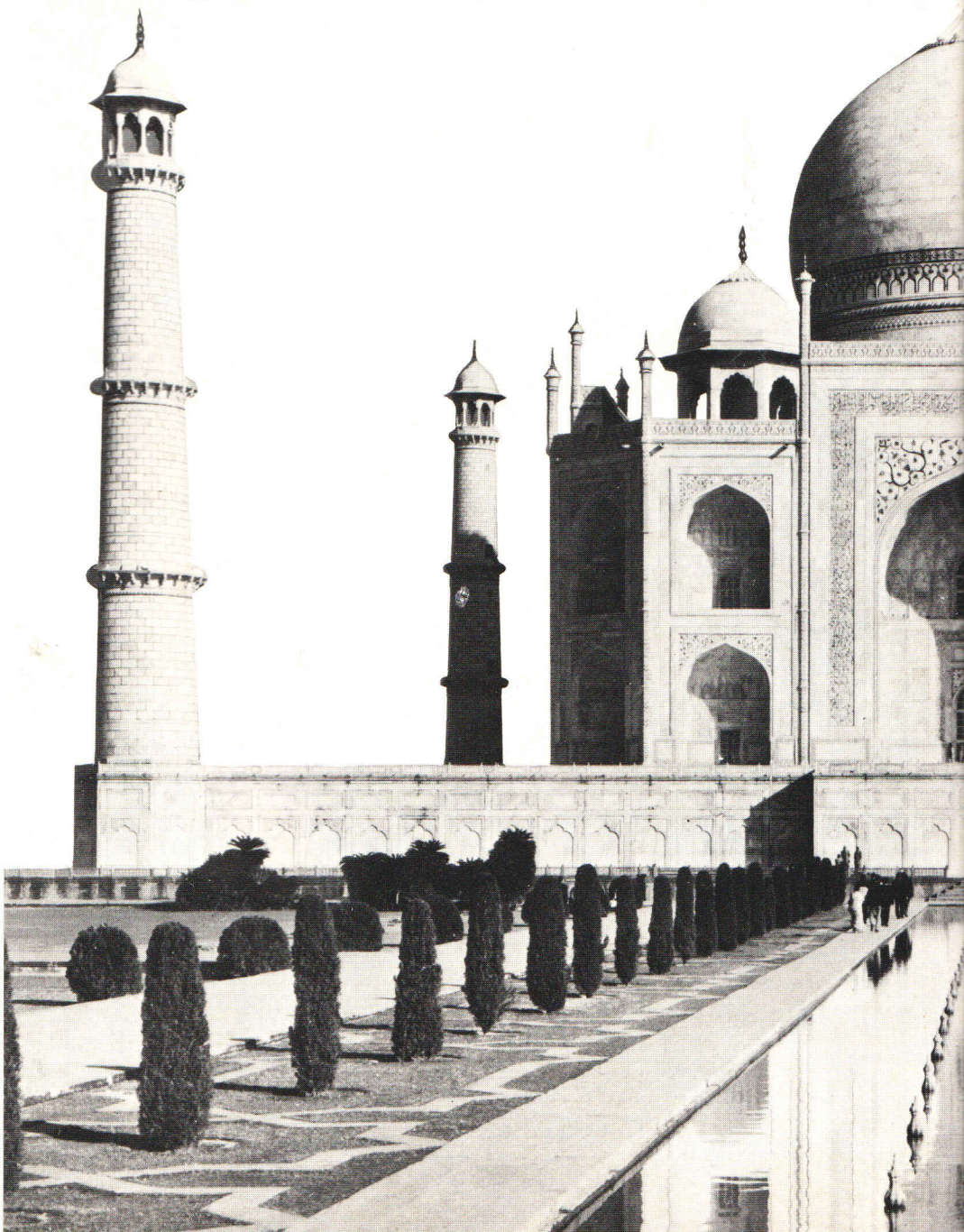
In the summer of 1899, the Russian War Minister said that his country intended to strengthen her position in Central Asia for defensive purposes and also for offensive operations in India if need be. Doubtless there was an element of bluff in such statements; the difficulty for the British was to decide whether they could be wholly ignored.

Curzon favoured a firmer line than the home government wished to adopt. When the Russians made an absurd charge about Britain's supposed offensive intentions in the Pamirs, he retorted that Britain was about as likely to attack Russia there as she was to organize a flotilla of balloons to assault Mars, and that the Russians knew it as well as Britain did. "Whenever they are hard pressed for an argument this is their invariable resource and I think that they should be told plainly that we know what bunkum it is."

Yet the policy of the British, with their worldwide responsibilities, could never be decided by local considerations alone. A few years before, many of the moves in the Great Game had turned upon Britain's capacity to make herself felt in the eastern Mediterranean. Now, for a spell, they turned upon events in South Africa. In the autumn of 1899 the Boer War began. On October 8, Curzon received a telegram asking that India should send troops. It is an index of the speed with which things were done in his day that the first contingents sailed on the 17th. The effect of the war – in which a vast force had to be sent abroad to chase an ever decreasing number of Boers – was virtually to paralyse British policy elsewhere.

Early in November, 1899, Tsar Nicholas II wrote: "*I do like knowing that it lies solely with me* in the last resort to change the course of the war in Africa. The means is very simple – telegraph an order for the whole Turkestan army to mobilize and march to the frontier. That's all. The strongest fleets in the world can't prevent us from settling our scores with England precisely at her most vulnerable point."

The Tsar's letter was somewhat fanciful, for Russia's railway was not yet complete to the border; she had, however,



just built a branch line from Merv to Kushk, 70 miles from Herat, in Afghanistan and, having in 1900 increased her influence in Persia with a large loan, she soon established direct relations between Russian and Afghan officials for frontier matters. In 1900 the last British division was mobilized and Curzon was informed that if war with Russia occurred in Central Asia, Britain could send no reinforcements to India.

Yet even in these circumstances, when Russia seemed to have the game so much in her own hands, her Central Asian policy imposed a severe strain, and there was no unrest in India and Afghanistan – which Britain had pledged herself to defend – of which she could take advantage despite all Britain's well-reported reverses in South Africa.

Then in 1902 Britain's position improved somewhat. The Boer War at last over, she signed an alliance with Japan, whose clash of interests with Russia in the Far East became increasingly plain; and in 1903, the British were at last able to break Russia's financial monopoly, and to make a loan to the Persian government.

The northern frontiers were not the only areas of Anglo-Russian rivalry. Russia also had designs on the Persian Gulf, where the British had a decided advantage. In 1899 a secret agreement with the Sheikh of Kuwait had virtually placed the area under British protection and in 1903, as Curzon had long desired, the Foreign Secretary announced that the British would regard the establishment of a Russian naval base in the Persian Gulf as "a very grave menace to British interests and . . . we should certainly resist it with all the means at our disposal." There was no desire on the part of the British to go on quarrelling needlessly with Russia; but several approaches to St. Petersburg met with no response, for the Russians had as yet no sufficient incentive to settle.

In these circumstances, Curzon asked permission to do what he had long wished to do, namely to pay an official viceregal visit to the Persian Gulf. With considerable reluctance, and warning him against any commitments, the Cabinet agreed. This tour, which Curzon enjoyed hugely, took place in the autumn of 1903.

His main purposes were to provide a convincing demonstration of British supremacy in the Gulf and to investigate at first hand its own strategic possibilities. The Sultan of Muscat received the party in suitable style and vowed his devotion to British interests. At Kuwait, the Sheikh went to great – but unavailing – pains to prepare a welcome befitting the dignity of the King-Emperor's representative. Hitherto there had not been a single wheeled vehicle in Kuwait, and a carriage had been specially requisitioned from Bombay. The landing of the official party took place on a beach so shallow that the principal members had to be carried ashore. The Sheikh's armed forces were drawn up along the beach. The Sheikh and Curzon stepped into the carriage and an ill-assorted procession set off for the town three miles distant along a dusty track, with the soldiers firing jubilantly in all directions and throwing their spears about. Some important members of Curzon's party, mounted to their astonishment and horror upon frisky Arab horses, found no small difficulty in keeping their seats. Curzon saw the British minister at Teheran, Sir Arthur Hardinge, thrown over the head of his horse. "Nothing daunted," Curzon wrote later, "he courageously resumed his seat and, amid a hail of bullets, continued the uneven tenor of his way." Then, while the Sheikh spoke most warmly of his attachment to the British cause, the horses kicked the wooden carriage to pieces and galloped off.

Curzon also held a ceremonial reception on board his ship, the S.S. *Hardinge*, escorted by six British men-of-war, for the chiefs of the Pirate Coast – it had derived its name from the activities which the British had largely suppressed – and presented the chiefs with swords, rifles and watches with huge chains.

The visit convinced Curzon more firmly

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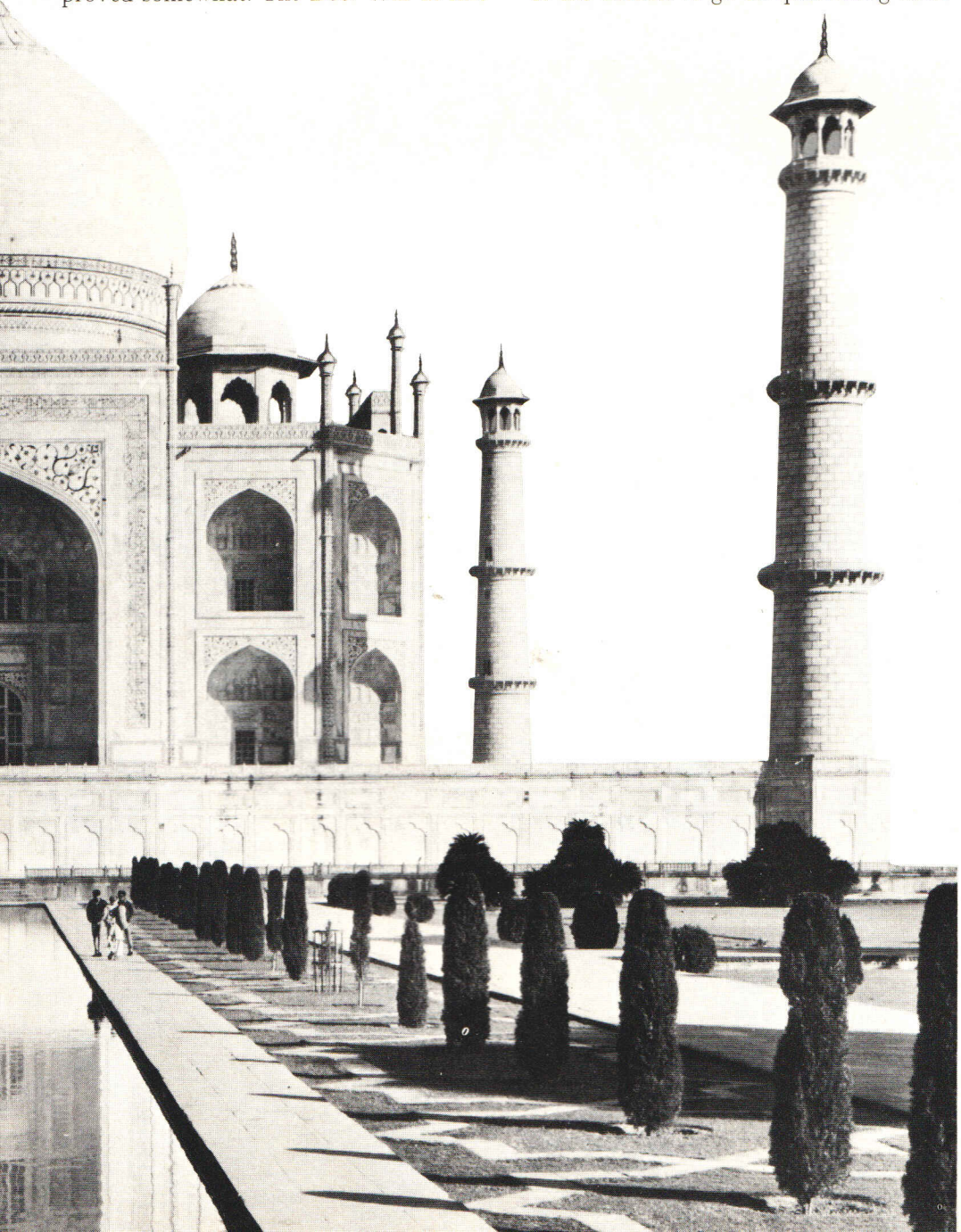


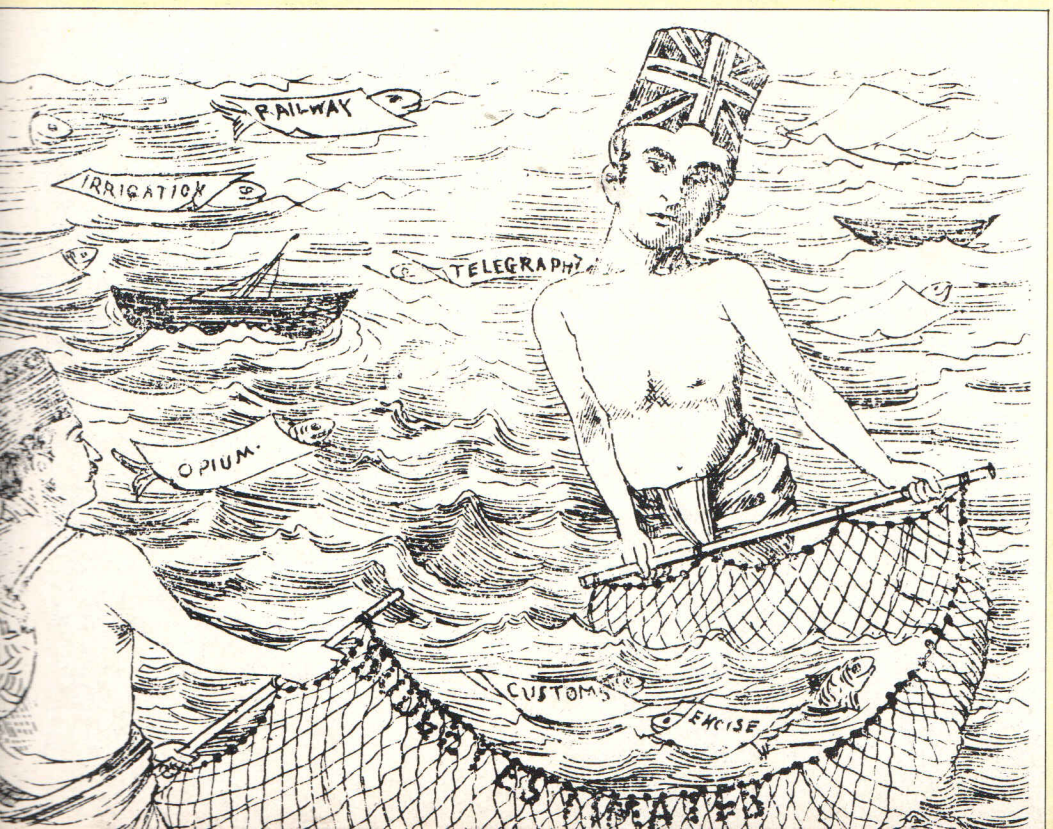
The present glory of the 17th-Century Taj Mahal owes much to the solicitude of Lord Curzon under whom the water-channels and gardens were restored and a scruffy bazaar and dusty forecourts summarily banished.

CURZON IN CARTOON

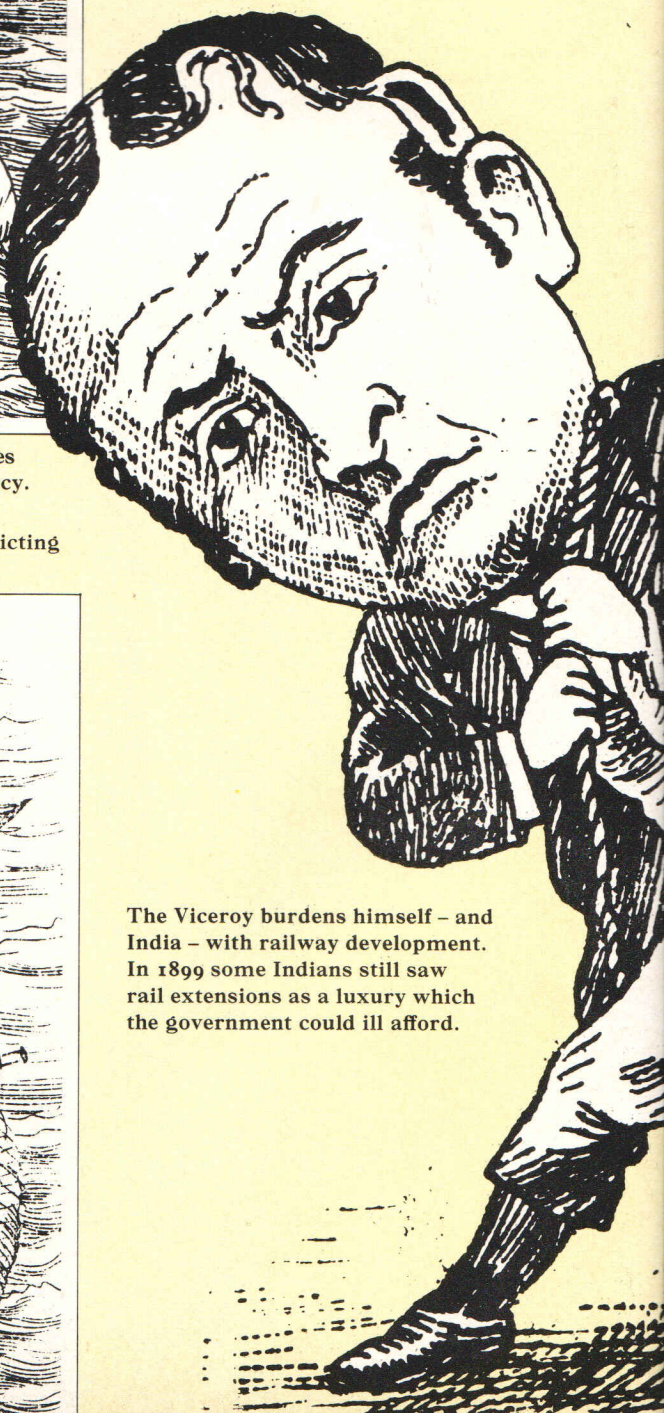
Lord Curzon's energetic rule in India made him an obvious subject of caricature in an Indian Press that since the 1880s had flourished free from any governmental restraints. By the turn of the century satirical magazines in both English and Indian languages such as *Hindi Punch, Maratha Punch* and *Bhimsen* were producing trenchant, if mostly laudatory, comment on the political topics of the day.

The cartoons here were among a collection printed in book form in 1902 as a tribute to the "many sided character" and "loveable traits of our Viceroy."

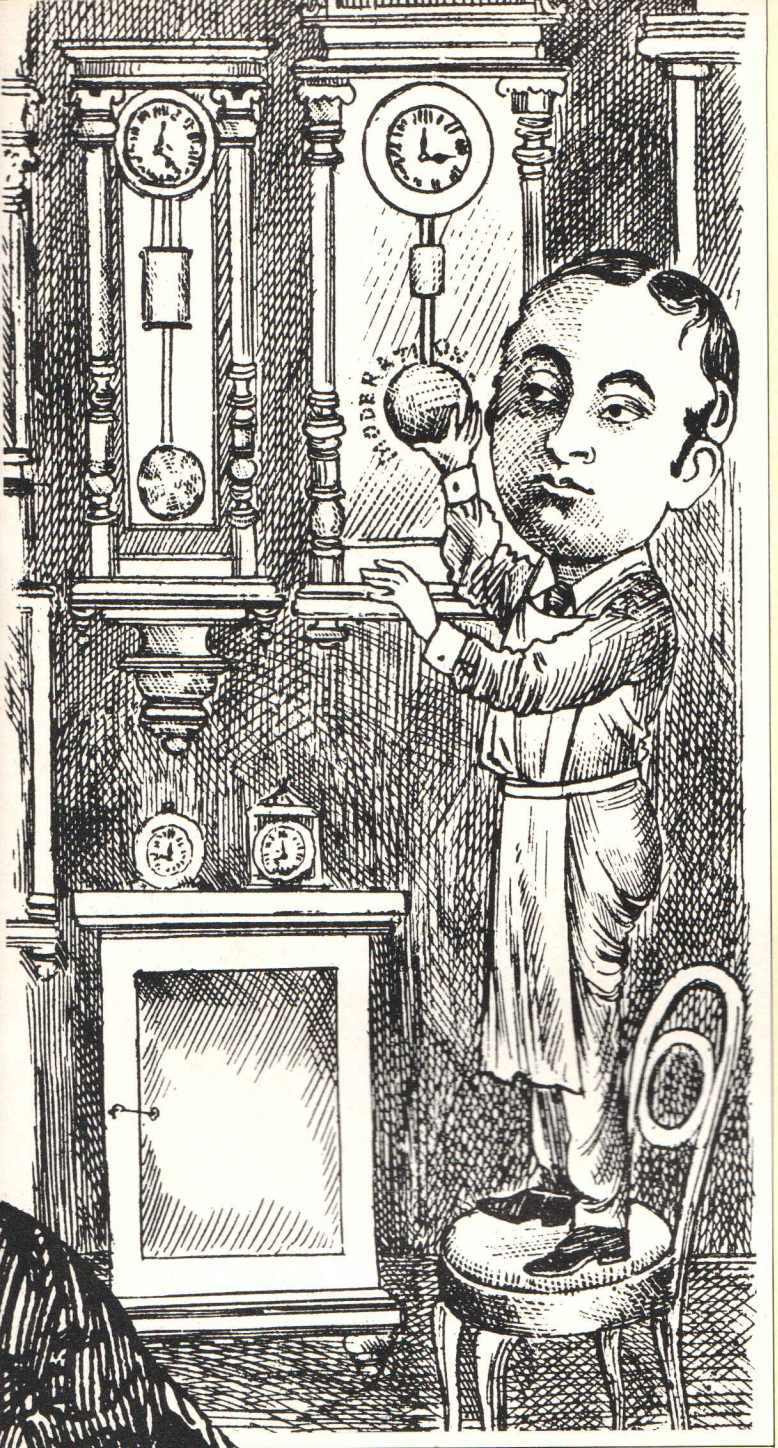
Curzon, having waived provincial contributions to the central exchequer, deftly tramples the serpent of famine and plague which, in 1899, had reduced Bombay to near bankruptcy.



Curzon and his Finance Minister drag the sea of India's financial resources and, in predicting a 1900–1 budget surplus, prepare to land a satisfactory financial haul for the country.

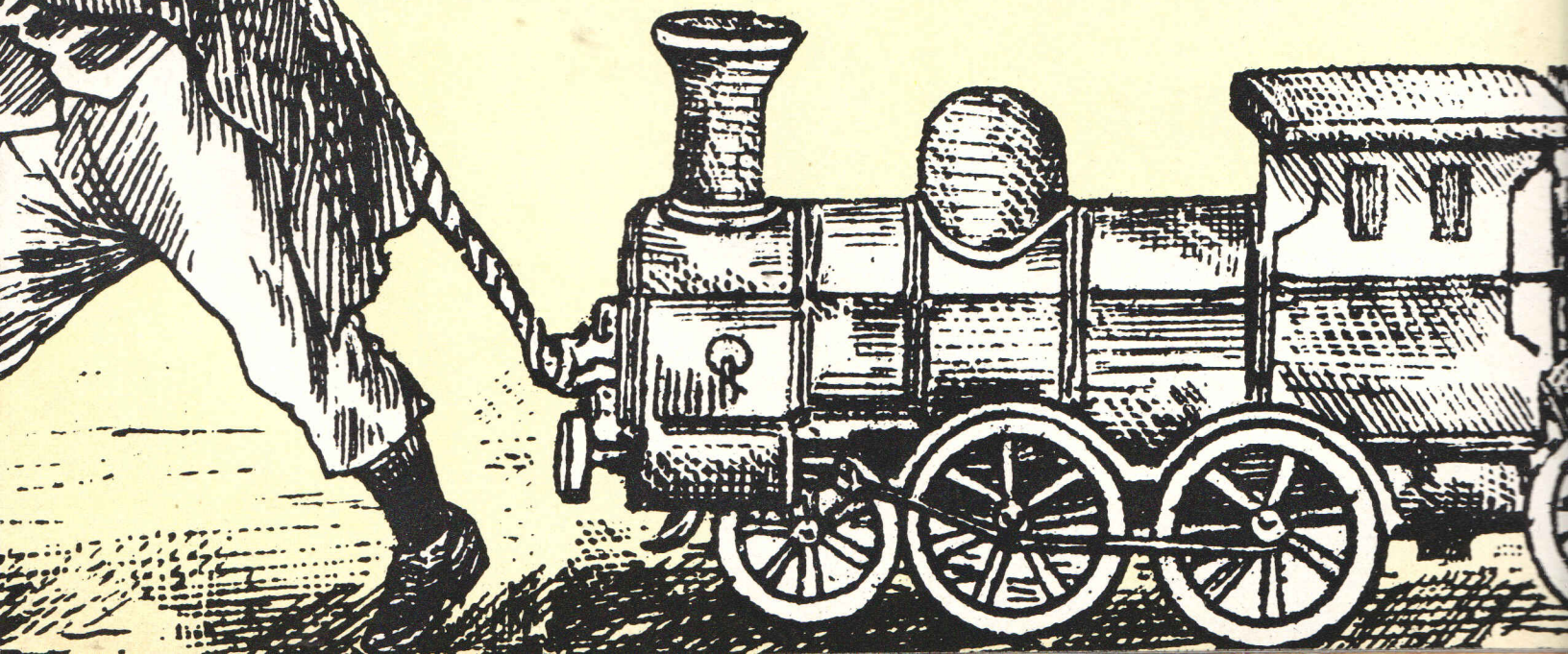


The Viceroy burdens himself – and India – with railway development. In 1899 some Indians still saw rail extensions as a luxury which the government could ill afford.



Curzon sets the political timepiece of India to "moderation." He aimed to resolve the differences between nationalists and the India Office.

The Angel Curzon banishes the brutal techniques – segregation of families and destruction of property – by which his predecessor had tried to control bubonic plague. His own less draconian methods proved equally effective.



Lord and Lady Curzon swelter gracefully while touring the Persian Gulf in November, 1903. The visit successfully asserted British supremacy against suspected Russian encroachment.

than ever that the policy of insisting upon British paramountcy in the Gulf had been the right one and that it was well within Britain's power to sustain it. "We opened these seas to the ships of all nations," he exclaimed to the chiefs, "and enabled their flags to fly in peace. We have not destroyed your independence but have preserved it. . . . The peace of these waters must still be maintained; your independence will continue to be upheld; and the influence of the British Government must remain supreme." Although the Foreign Secretary referred cheerfully in private to "George Curzon's prancings in the Persian puddle," the two were essentially of one mind in point of policy.

On the north-eastern frontier of India, a third area of potential Russian danger, Tibet had remained inviolate, a mysterious and remote theocracy. In 1901, stories of contacts between the Russians and the Tibetans began to circulate. The government of India made renewed efforts to get in touch with the Dalai Lama. Curzon disclaimed any desire to seize Tibet. It would, he wrote, be madness for the British to cross the Himalayas; but it was important that no one else should take the country.

"If Russia were to come down to the big mountains," he wrote, "she would at once begin intriguing with Nepal, and we should have a second Afghanistan on the north. . . . Tibet itself, and not Nepal, must be the buffer that we endeavour to create."

Curzon's letters, however, were returned unopened from Tibet, and in the late summer of 1902 rumours spread of a secret compact between Russia and Tibet. The government of India proposed a conference at Lhasa, pointing out that in Tibet at least India had a marked advantage over Russia, whose territory did not adjoin Tibet. The Cabinet, however, showed a marked disinclination to offend Russia. "I sometimes say to myself," Curzon complained, "'Is it worth while struggling on when our own people and leaders are themselves engaged in tracing the handwriting on the wall?'" Eventually it was agreed that delegates should meet Tibetan officials just over the Tibetan frontier. Russia would not be involved: she denied officially that she had any agreement with Tibet.

Although these issues of foreign policy attracted much attention at the time, Curzon was by no means exclusively preoccupied with them. He pushed forward his large programmes of reform. Often the result hardly justified the effort, as in the case of the conference on Indian education over which he presided at Simla in the summer of 1901. This gathering passed 150 resolutions, each of which Curzon had drafted. He worked himself almost to a breakdown in the process, and had to retire to bed for several weeks afterwards to recover from severe pains in the back.

His hard work, however, won him

Members of the Viceroy's bodyguard are piggy-backed through the shallows of the Persian Gulf to waiting horses during Lord Curzon's official visit in 1903.

scant reward. Proposals from India were often unwelcome in London. Curzon conceived that the Council that advised the Secretary of State in London was ill-disposed towards him, and even threatened resignation in the summer of 1902.

In the same year, he had to endure much criticism in the Press and Parliament for the stern line he had taken on another matter – the punishing of a smart regiment for the brutality of some of its members, who had assaulted two Indians so viciously that they had died.

Curzon condemned severely the attempts of some of the military authorities to hush it all up. With the staunch support of Lord George Hamilton, the Secretary of State for India, Curzon insisted that the regiment must be punished, since the individual culprits could not be identified. In the previous 20 years there had been 84 recorded cases in which Indians had been killed in clashes with Europeans, but only two instances in which Europeans had been hanged for the murder of Indians since the Mutiny. His minute on the subject deserves quotation:

"I know that as long as Europeans, and particularly a haughty race like the English, rule Asiatic people like the Indians, incidents of *hubris* and violence will occur, and that the white men will tend to side with the white skin against the dark. But I also know, and have acted throughout on the belief, that it is the duty of statesmanship to arrest these dangerous symptoms and to prevent them from attaining dimensions that might even threaten the existence of our rule in the future. . . .

"I have observed the growing temper of the native. The new wine is beginning to ferment within him, and he is attaining to a consciousness of equality and freedom. . . . I recognise that unless this movement [towards violent collisions] is kept in check – and check is only possible, not by crushing the aspirations of the native, which are destined to grow, but by controlling the temper of the European – it may, nay it must, reach a pitch when it will boil over in mutiny and rebellion, and when the English may be in danger of losing their command of India."

Abdur Rahman, Amir of Afghanistan, concludes a meeting with British officials in the 1880s. Curzon's friendship with the Amir, formed at this time, was to benefit him in the future.

At the great durbar held in Delhi in January, 1903, to celebrate the accession to the throne of King Edward VII, the officers and men of the punished regiment, the 9th Lancers, were enthusiastically cheered by the Europeans, including Curzon's own guests, an action that wounded him deeply.

Curzon's term of office was due to end in 1904. He had accomplished much but some of the most important reforms – including ones that affected education, irrigation, railways and the police – were still going forward. Curzon said that he would like to proceed with some of the reforms; if the government wished it, he would stay on another year or two

The Great Delhi Durbar

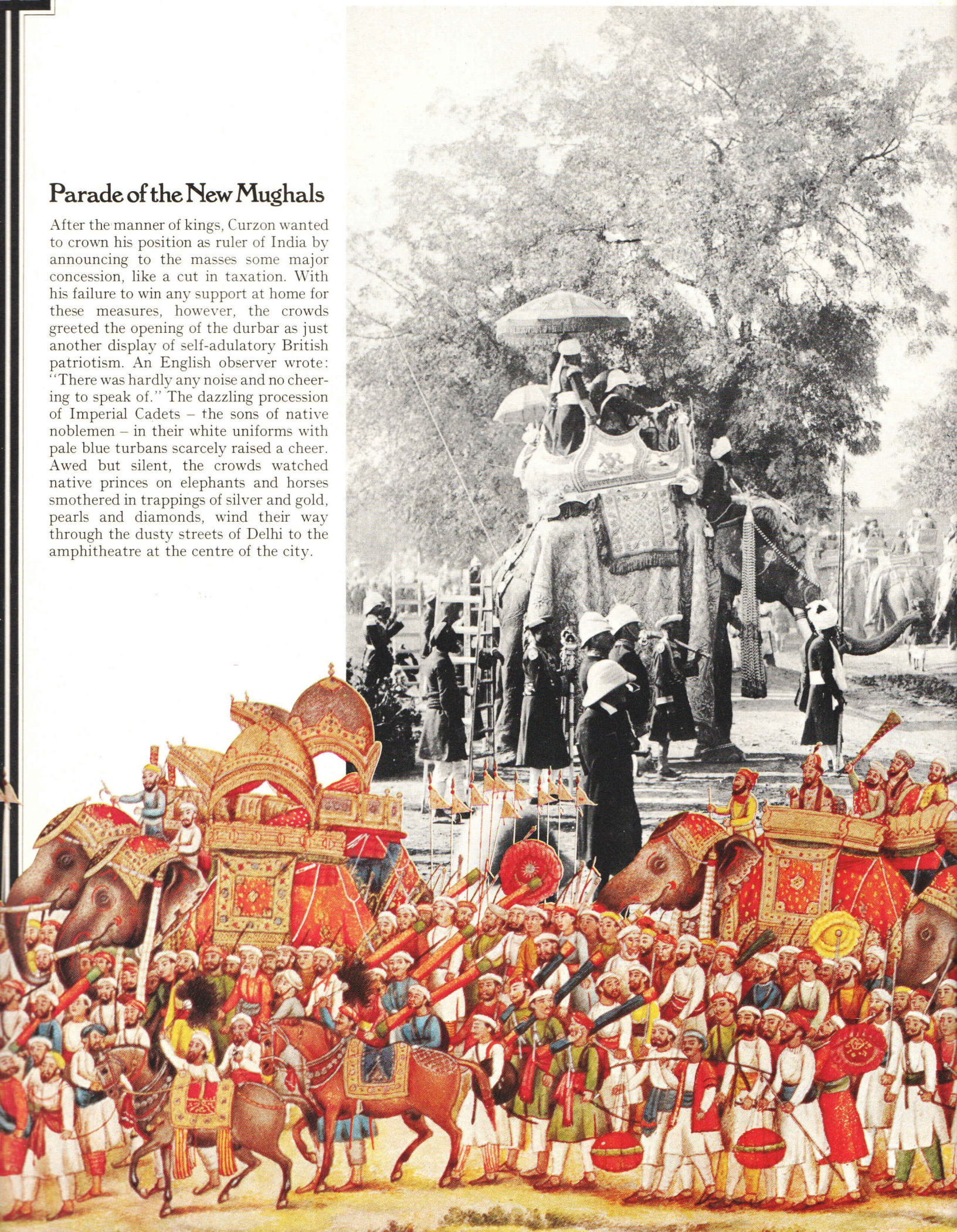
The durbar of January, 1903, was Curzon's own brainchild, conceived by the Viceroy as an outward and visible sign of the imperial ideal to which he had dedicated his life. The official reason for the durbar was the accession of the new King-Emperor Edward VII. But it was much more than this: the durbar – from the Persian meaning a council or ceremonial gathering – was intended to strengthen British rule by giving it a formal stamp of legitimacy in keeping with the centuries-old tradition by which previous rulers in India had exhibited their power or decided matters of state. The royal parade through Delhi, the pageant in the arena, the investiture of the Duke of Connaught (who represented the King), and the festivities were set off against an exotic display of Indian painting, jewellery, tapestries, carpets and manuscripts. It was all intended, as Curzon said, "to lift an entire people for a little space out of the rut of their narrow and parochial lives and let them catch a glimpse of a higher ideal."

A meticulously woven textile of an early Mughal Durbar procession captures the historic splendours deliberately recalled by Curzon's durbar of 1903.

Lord Curzon (centre), Arthur, Duke of Connaught (left) and Lord Kitchener, the Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army, made up of the triumvirate of imperial rulers who assumed the mantle of the Mughal emperors on behalf of the British.

Parade of the New Mughals

After the manner of kings, Curzon wanted to crown his position as ruler of India by announcing to the masses some major concession, like a cut in taxation. With his failure to win any support at home for these measures, however, the crowds greeted the opening of the durbar as just another display of self-adulatory British patriotism. An English observer wrote: "There was hardly any noise and no cheering to speak of." The dazzling procession of Imperial Cadets – the sons of native noblemen – in their white uniforms with pale blue turbans scarcely raised a cheer. Awed but silent, the crowds watched native princes on elephants and horses smothered in trappings of silver and gold, pearls and diamonds, wind their way through the dusty streets of Delhi to the amphitheatre at the centre of the city.



Lord and Lady Curzon, seated in a gold-embossed howdah on their elephant (left), observe the procession of durbar guests.

This tapestry of Akbar II's durbar in 1810 portrays a clear precedent for Curzon's own parade of imperial glory. In Akbar's procession were top-hatted East India Company representatives, riding on elephants as befitted honoured guests.

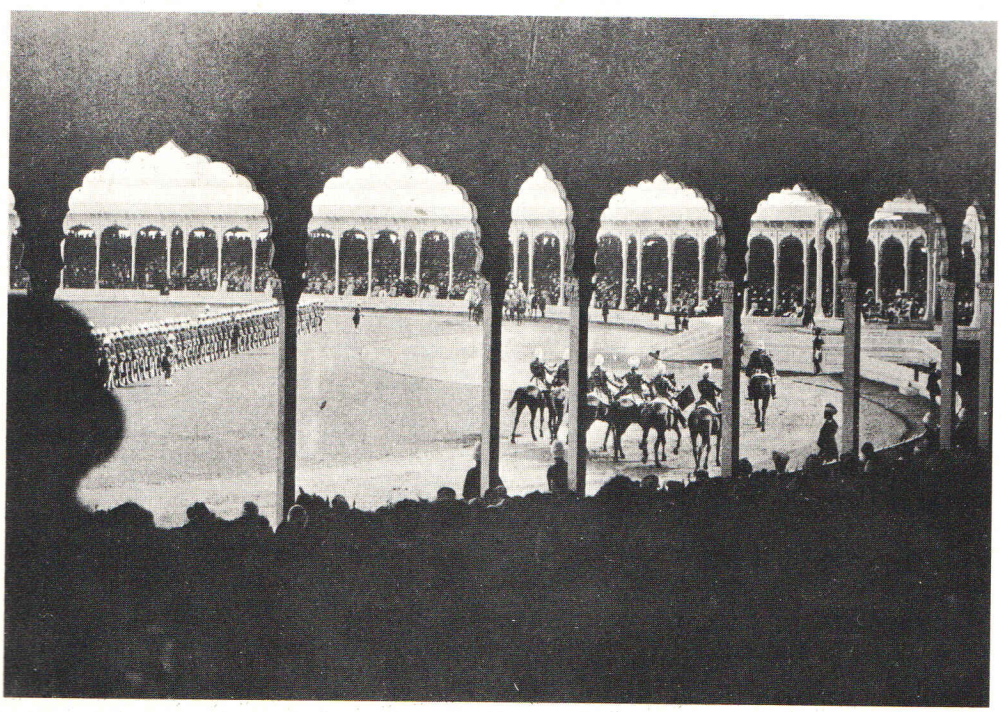
The guest tents had stove-heated fully furnished rooms equipped with electric light.

The Meeting of Ruler and Ruled

The crowds, the cavalry, the swaying elephants bearing princes in their howdahs – "walking pagodas glittering with cloth of gold," as one eyewitness commented – weaved into a great amphitheatre "like a gigantic bejewelled serpent." In the throng was the greatest array of native leaders that India had ever seen. Here, too, marched the surviving native and British veterans of the Mutiny half a century before.

Now, at last, as the massed bands played "Auld Lang Syne," the silence gave way and the crowds of Indians and British, reconciled for a time by the power of the spectacle, shouted and hurrahed until they were hoarse.

Crowds in the amphitheatre, which held 30,000 people in all, watch the parade of representatives from every state in India.



This Indian painting of a durbar held in Lahore in 1846 shows the luxury of a durbar tent. The Sikh leader Gulab Singh (centre) celebrates the ratification of a treaty with the East India Company, represented by (left to right) Henry Lawrence; the Commander-in-Chief, Lord Gough; and the Governor-General, Lord Hardinge. These sumptuous rooms with tapestries and guards were more than matched by the tents at Curzon's durbar.

British and Indian leaders chat in the grandstand before the review begins.

A Noble Design

At the end of the ceremony came the march-past, a succession of carriages, litters, musicians, dancers, wrestlers, men in masks, giants, dwarfs, hunting hawks and hounds. The display struck many Europeans as alternately splendid and comic, but it was, as Curzon intended, a uniquely Indian affair.

In London reports spoke of the spontaneity and depth of Indian loyalty. It was a superficial impression. The durbar was more of a tribute to Curzon's organizing ability and his single-minded confidence in Britain's imperial role. Noble and dramatic in concept, the durbar served for a time to hide the increasing tensions that threatened the Raj.

The silks and jewelled necklaces of the Maharajah of Bundi exemplify the finery in which the native princes dressed.

At a durbar in Udaipur in 1855, the Rajah (centre) confers with East India Company officials, led by Sir Henry Lawrence (on the ruler's right). Durbars were often as much council meetings to decide policy as glorious parades, and this aspect of the tradition was recalled in the 1903 durbar by the gathering of native leaders in the arena.

II. A Tarnished Brilliance

There was no reason why Curzon should not remain as Viceroy as he suggested. There had yet occurred no serious crisis. Afghanistan and Tibet, despite Curzon's desire for a stronger policy, were quiet and in one very important respect, that of frontier affairs, Curzon's policy had ever been a cautious one. Against much local opposition, he had instituted a new North-West Frontier Province, directly responsible to the government of India, and abolished the control of frontier affairs through the Punjab government. He refused to build large forts in exposed places, concentrated mobile forces at points from which they could easily be moved forward and insisted upon the creation of tribal levies under British officers. In the upshot, the policy of frequent raids of retribution into tribal territory, known as "butcher and bolt" or "burn and beat it," virtually ceased. After some hesitations, the new Prime Minister, Arthur Balfour, agreed that Curzon's term of office should be extended.

Curzon's leave at home, during which he hoped to settle his differences with the Cabinet and recuperate from the effects of more than five years' intense work, proved a disappointment to him and to his colleagues in London. Events in India went badly and he was beset by agonizing personal problems.

His intimate friend from boyhood days, St. John Brodrick, had succeeded Lord George Hamilton at the India Office, but found himself to be at odds with Curzon on many issues.

The mission to Tibet, under Colonel Younghusband, advanced slowly and fought a pitched battle in which many Tibetans were killed. Younghusband was then authorized to proceed to Lhasa and demand an indemnity that could be paid off in three years. The actual convention signed by Younghusband early in September provided for the indemnity to be paid over 75 years, and for the occupation during that time of a small tongue of Tibetan territory, called the Chumbi Valley, adjacent to India. The Cabinet insisted that these terms be amended, Balfour and Brodrick wrongly believing that Curzon had urged Younghusband to disobey his instructions. Finding himself in disagreement with the Prime Minister on several issues, Curzon offered his resignation from the Viceroyalty. His resignation was refused.

Then, just before Curzon and his adored wife were due to return to India in September, she was taken critically ill. She recovered only slowly, but sufficiently for him to leave in November. "It is with a sad and miserable heart," he wrote to her, "that I go, leaving all that makes life worth living behind me . . . to toil and isolation and often worse. But it seems to be destiny; and God who has smitten us so hard must surely have better things in store." And to Lord Ampthill, who had temporarily replaced him as Viceroy during the summer: "I regret very little of my work in India, though the methods may often have been open to exception. The bulk of it I would certainly do again, even if I knew of the storms ahead, and in my conscience I have never wavered."

Only eight months separated Curzon's return to India from his resignation of the Viceroyalty. His achievements contrasted sadly with those of his previous term of office. His first disappointment came from Afghanistan. Russia, despite a war then raging with Japan, had just completed the railway from Orenburg to Tashkent, which enabled Chinese Turkestan or the Afghan border to be reached in six days from Moscow. Throughout 1904 alarming reports had come from Central Asia. The new railways, it seemed, would allow Russia to deploy great armies in Turkestan and Transcaspia. The military staffs in India calculated that within two months of the outbreak of war Russia could place 60,000 men on each of two lines of advance. The Amir Habibullah of Afghanistan, although showing plainly that he did not want British troops to help defend Afghanistan against

Princes from one of India's 600 native states pose for the camera. Curzon wrongly saw the princes, rather than the National Congress, as the leaders of a modern India.

This ornately decorated elephant was sketched and captioned at the Delhi durbar by *Punch* artist Leonard Raven-Hill for inclusion in his *Indian Sketch Book*, published the same year.

a Russian invasion, vowed to resist.

The British Prime Minister, Balfour, wanted Afghanistan to remain as long as possible a barren and inhospitable region, providing a politically neutral, geographically hostile barrier against any Russian advance. Curzon, however, wanted to press for a far less one-sided agreement: he did not believe that the Amir would go over to the Russians even if strongly pressed by the British for a pro-British commitment. The Amir, quite consistently, stood out for a mere renewal of the agreements made by the British with his father. Curzon wished to send an ultimatum; the Cabinet refused. Long-promised talks, therefore, did not resolve the ambiguities and disputes of the past few years but ended in the signature of a treaty on the Amir's terms, which could doubtless have been obtained without sending any mission. Curzon felt deeply the overruling of his advice.

By then, however, he was enmeshed in the issue which soon caused his resignation. On Curzon's repeated request, Lord Kitchener, the popular hero of the day, who had defeated the Dervishes at Omdurman and received the Boers' surrender, had come to India as Commander-in-Chief. Kitchener had a reputation for drive, efficiency and energy. Curzon judged the army in India to be sadly in need of those qualities. Almost immediately on his arrival, Kitchener proposed that the existing system of divided military administration in India – whereby the Commander-in-Chief and the Military Member of the government both had seats on the Viceroy's Council – should be altered. He wanted the Commander-in-Chief alone to represent the Indian Army on the Viceroy's Council. This would give Kitchener sole authority over the Military Department, which controlled both the army's administration and its financial proposals, by far the largest item in the Indian budget.

This was part of a wider argument that the army in India would come to grief under its existing organization if it had to fight a great campaign. Kitchener believed that the extension of Russian railways in Central Asia had an offensive purpose. There his view accorded with that of the Prime Minister and the military authorities in London. During 1904 a great scheme for the redistribution of the army in India, based on the assumption that its purpose was no longer to provide against internal disturbance, but against the external threat, was carried through with Curzon's support.

But during his absence in England Kitchener again raised the issue of the Military Department, and threatened immediate resignation unless his wishes were met. He was begged to stay and was promised an inquiry.

In London, Curzon had several discussions with the Prime Minister, Balfour, about this issue. He had already realized with a sickening heart that Kitchener was bent upon getting his way and that with his vast prestige he would probably succeed. Eventually Curzon proposed and the home government agreed, that on his return to India the government there should look into the whole question thoroughly and report to London.

Kitchener established himself firmly. He contended openly that the Commander-in-Chief alone should represent the army in all its aspects on the Viceroy's Council and charged that the Military Member was under the existing system "really omnipotent in military affairs."

He also opened secret channels of communication with the Prime Minister, the Secretary of State and others in influential positions at home. He increased pressure on Curzon by ensuring that the British Press were liberally supplied during the spring and summer of 1905 with supposedly secret papers.

When the issue came to the Viceroy's Council on March 10, Kitchener found himself in a minority of one and declined to discuss the business in detail. He did, however, use again the argument to which the Cabinet and the Prime Minister were extremely susceptible, that a war on land with Russia could not be successfully fought under the Indian military system. By almost every mail from home, Curzon received information that Kitchener was threatening resignation unless the decision favoured him; and the Viceroy himself told the Prime Minister on March 30 that he felt so strongly on this matter that he would resign if what he regarded as a fundamental principle of the administration were destroyed. "I could not accept,"

Indian forces, like this polished mountain battery unit, were the backbone of the British military presence in India. Curzon was concerned to reform what he saw as "slackness and jobbery" in British units.

he wrote, "so striking proof of want of confidence in the government which I have now administered for over six years."

Eventually a compromise was reached in London that conceded most but not all of Kitchener's demands. A Military Member was to be left on the Viceroy's Council, but with functions so restricted that, as Curzon correctly predicted, his position was soon abolished. During June and July a prolonged correspondence by telegram took place between the Viceroy and the authorities in London, the former trying to secure larger and better defined powers for the Military Member.

At last it became clear to Curzon that he and the Cabinet did not mean the same thing. He also felt deeply the form in which the decisions had been conveyed, and the more so because the Secretary of State was his lifelong friend, Brodrick. The Cabinet for its part was convinced that Curzon had deliberately suppressed some of the facts and had revealed secret telegrams to the Press. Curzon regretted his failure to resign when the home government's decision first reached India. Since he could not obtain assurances of the Cabinet's future support, he insisted upon laying down the Viceroyalty in the middle of August, 1905.

In private, Curzon said bitterly that he deeply regretted ever having brought to India the Commander-in-Chief whom he had found to be devoid of truthfulness and honour. For his part, Kitchener charged that Curzon had misrepresented his views. Thus Curzon's Indian career came to its unfitting close amidst recriminations and hostility. He received no word of official thanks for his services and, unlike previous Viceroys, no honour on his return. His intimate friendship with Brodrick was broken for ever and he carried the scars of this episode for the rest of his life.

Just as he left India, he said in a famous speech that he had resigned because the new organization would subordinate civilian power to military, and because he believed that the British government must pay regard to Indian authority in determining India's needs. The last passage of this oration expresses eloquently

Men of an Indian Army regiment pose for the camera. They are (from left) bugler, rifleman, subahdar-major or commandant, havildar or sergeant and naik or corporal.

Curzon's paternal conception of Britain's duty as an imperial power, his conviction that her work was righteous and enduring:

"A hundred times in India have I said to myself, 'Oh that to every Englishman in this country, as he ends his work, might be truthfully applied the phrase "Thou hast loved righteousness and hated iniquity."' No man has, I believe, ever served India faithfully of whom that could not be said. All other triumphs are tinsel and sham. Perhaps there are few of us who make anything but a poor approximation to that ideal. But let it be our ideal all the same . . . to remember that the Almighty has placed your hand on the greatest of his ploughs, in whose furrow the nations of the future are germinating

Lord Kitchener, Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army, and a second "giant" in India, effectively forced Curzon to resign in 1905.

and taking shape, to drive the blade a little forward in your time, and to feel that somewhere among these millions you have left a little justice or happiness or prosperity, a sense of manliness or moral dignity, a spring of patriotism, a dawn of intellectual enlightenment or a stirring of duty where it did not exist before – that is enough, that is the Englishman's justification in India. It is good enough for his watchword while he is here, for his epitaph when he is gone. I have worked for no other aim. Let India be my judge."

Curzon reached England just as the long Conservative ascendancy was ending. Balfour's government resigned, to be succeeded by a Liberal administration. When he assumed the Viceroyalty, Curzon had taken an Irish peerage, so that he could go back to the House of Commons on his return, but political difficulties and personal tragedy dogged his path.

King Edward VII and others expressed the strong view that a former Viceroy should not immediately embroil himself in party politics; the open disagreements that had surrounded Curzon's resignation cut him off to some degree from his former Conservative colleagues; and his wife, who had been so desperately ill during their leave in England but who had been able to rejoin him in India for a few months, slowly faded away and died at the age of 36 in the summer of 1906, leaving him with three small daughters.

Although Curzon entered the House of Lords and became a leading Conservative figure in it, he played only an intermittent role in political life until 1915. Other offices, including the Presidency of the Royal Geographical Society and the Chancellorship of Oxford University, occupied but a part of his energies. Unlike most Conservative leaders, he vigorously but unavailingly supported the campaign for conscription. During the first part of the war, he felt acutely his inability to play any serious part in it. "Pitiful," he reflected, "... that at 39 one was thought fit to rule 300 millions of people and at 55 is not wanted to do anything in an emergency in which the national existence is at stake."

From his re-entry into high office in 1915 however, till his death ten years later, Curzon occupied a leading place in British and imperial affairs. He was one of Lloyd George's small and highly talented War Cabinet; he then served as Foreign Secretary from 1919 to 1924. These were times of quite exceptional difficulty, magnified by Lloyd George's secretiveness and deviousness. Curzon laboured unceasingly and with a distinction that has hardly yet been recognized. He failed only by a hair's breadth to become Prime Minister in 1923, when the issue lay between him and the relatively obscure Stanley Baldwin.

Lord Curzon's statuesque appearance, his stately diction, his several country houses, his supposedly rigid views seemed to make him an anachronistic figure. In his last years and under pressure of endless overwork, his curvature of the spine and other illnesses troubled him increasingly and robbed him of sleep. He accepted quickly and without rancour that his lifelong ambition to be Prime Minister could not now be realized and looked more nostalgically to his time in India and to his Asiatic wanderings. "In India," he used to say, "the whole spirit of service there was different. Everyone there was out to do something."

It was Curzon's great good fortune, in a career that brought much abuse and ill-luck, to obtain in the Viceroyalty a post for which his training and inclination suited him and at a time of life when his zeal, fierce energy and cutting edge were unimpaired. He said simply that he had given to India all that was worth having of his spirit and strength; and he hoped that if history should deign to notice his efforts he should not be thought to have wrought entirely in vain. The post of Viceroy – the dream of his childhood, the fulfilled ambition of his manhood, representing his highest conception of duty to the State – he described as "not a pastime but an ordeal; not a pageant alone, but as often a pain."

For all his attention to Indian public opinion, and his realization that the new wine was beginning to ferment in the country, Curzon had no intention that British government of India should be brought to an end in the foreseeable future. He would take Indian opinion into account, without being bound by it; and when he urged, as he repeatedly did in the latter part of the Viceroyalty, that the Cabinet and the India Office should cease the attempt to govern India in detail from Whitehall, he was claiming autonomy not for the Indian people, whom he judged unfit to exercise it yet, but for the British government of India. By his insistence on strict and impartial justice, by making the government more efficient, far-sighted and responsive, he hoped to perpetuate and strengthen the foundations of British power, to cause it to be regarded as indispensable, a state of affairs which he sincerely believed to be in India's best interests. With some reason, he predicted that when British power was finally withdrawn, the political unity of India could not be sustained.

It is true that a Viceroy who looked upon himself as more of a politician and less of an administrator than Curzon would have handled Indian sentiment more deftly, would have been more tactful in his public utterances. When all that is said and done, however, it is a mistake to attribute the subsequent temper of Indian nationalism to Curzon. The growing consciousness of national feeling, which the British in general and Curzon himself had done much to accentuate, would no doubt have expressed itself in any event.

A man holding a great public office should ideally possess creative instinct, power of speech, industry, insight, knowledge of his subject, willingness to defer on all points except the essential, a power to inspire subordinates, capacity to give clear directions. In some of those qualities Curzon was deficient, in others abundantly endowed; but on balance Britain did not send his superior to India in the 90 years which separated the Mutiny from independence. He followed to the end of his life the affairs of India with eager, almost pathetic, interest. He declared that his work there was the part of his public life which he valued the most, both for the labour and for the spirit in which it had been done, and said that he would be content to be judged by it. He wrote this just epitaph for himself:

"In divers offices and in many lands
as explorer, writer, administrator,
and ruler of men,
he sought to serve his country
and add honour to an ancient name"

Gala dress, 1779