

King Edward VIII

THE OFFICIAL BIOGRAPHY



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no good end.¹ The letter exudes pessimism, but his true frame of mind is portrayed more vividly in the letter he wrote to Freda Dudley Ward a few days later:

My beloved, I couldn't be more gloomy or depressed than I am tonight, and I'm oh! so desperately sad and lonely and missing and oh! wanting you and wanting oh! so badly my precious little Freddie!! I naturally want you most when I'm up against it all as I am now, sweetheart, as I do love you love you so, and although I loathe Xmas as a festival, yet it does somehow suggest happiness, and it's so ironical everyone wishing me a happy Xmas . . . Surely they must know that I can't possibly *ever* be in the teeniest way happy when I'm away from my Freddie?²

This was his blackest moment of the tour. Reading's robust reassurance that the visit was of immense importance and was 'doing real good – infinitely more than you think',³ came at a moment when the crowds had been responding more enthusiastically and the Prince's morale was in some measure restored. The Viceroy reported in February that the Prince 'really does feel that his trip has done and is going good'.⁴ He overstated his case. The Prince really did feel, and continued to feel, that the trip had been, on the whole, a futile enterprise. But he was ready to accept that *some* Indians had been favourably impressed, *some* British heartened. He even began to feel a modest measure of pride in his achievements.

As in Australia, physical exhaustion contributed to his depression. He slept badly during the interminable journeys by train, stayed up too late, ate too little, drank and smoked too much, as always overdid the exercise. 'HRH's present method of life,' reported his doctor, 'is such as may involve a complete breakdown of his whole nervous system.'⁵ One trouble was that, deprived of Freda Dudley Ward's companionship, he got very little fun out of the tour. Confronted by the great archaeological finds at Taxila, he remarked gloomily to Lady Birdwood: 'This place ought never to have been dug up.'⁶ The famous Buddha's tooth at Kandy in Ceylon 'isn't a tooth at all, merely a sordid, dirty piece of bone. Then there was a ghastly procession of elephants which included native dancing and hideous noises, which was really native music.'⁷

Almost the only exception was the Taj Mahal. After the statutory visit by moonlight he told Queen Mary that it had 'gripped me and I shall never forget what I've seen tonight'. He even paid a second visit – 'a contingency,' Thomas remarked, 'against which I should have betted heavily'.¹

'One of the tragic things about this Tour,' wrote Lord Cromer, 'is that HRH is not really keen on big-game shooting or shooting of any kind.'² Tragic is perhaps too strong a word, but to the Indian princes, who invested shooting with an almost mystic significance, the Prince's indifference seemed inexplicable. In Nepal fortunes were squandered in setting up a big-game camp; the Prince preferred to wander around with a shotgun looking for jungle fowl, or better still, to exercise his polo pony in a nearby clearing. It was a great disappointment to the Maharaja, Piers Legh told his father. It was a great disappointment to Legh too. 'Everything is sacrificed to polo, which the Prince is mad about,' he wrote resentfully. 'We consequently don't get as much shooting as we should.'³ Polo, pig-sticking and steeplechasing were indeed the Prince's greatest pleasures in India. Yet even on the polo ground he could not escape from his role: in Jodhpur the young players had been told to treat him gently and only on his insistence did they relax and ride roughly against him; in Mandalay his team won a competition, 'though it's become such a farce this cup business as somehow it's always arranged that I should win . . . and I do loathe it!!'⁴

His morale was not improved by periodic carping from Buckingham Palace. George V was disconcerted to see photographs of the Prince wearing blue overalls with white tunic – 'A most extraordinarily ugly uniform . . . The regulations ought never to have been altered without my approval.'⁵ He felt 'little short of despair' when he read that, at Lucknow, the Prince had taken over the drums in the band playing at a dance at Government House – 'What will the natives think of the Heir Apparent assuming such a role?' asked a shocked Lord Stamfordham.⁶ The band was playing in a gallery, invisible to the dancers, answered Cromer. The journalist who reported the news had been grossly indiscreet. 'I have spoken to HRH about this and he quite understands the point.'⁷

'The whole crux is whether the Prince of Wales makes the

Indians feel he *likes* them,' Lord Riddell told Cromer. 'They are extraordinarily sensitive and they know intuitively, past belief.¹ The Prince did not like them; least of all did he like those to whom he came closest, the Indian rulers. He disapproved of the pomposity and lavishness of their way of life; their propensity to ape all the most unattractive features of European civilization; their determination to ingratiate themselves with the son of the King Emperor. In Nepal tigers were paraded before him so that it was almost impossible for him to miss them; in Mysore the Maharaja let him win at squash. After this last offence he raged vengefully against those ignoble potentates and cannot have left the Maharaja himself in much doubt about his feelings.²

Since the Prince at the time was suffering from insomnia, indigestion and what he described as 'smoker's heart', his bile is perhaps explicable. His staff should have been able to jolly him out of such excesses. Unfortunately only Mountbatten was close enough to him to understand his moods, and Mountbatten was preoccupied with his own courtship of Edwina Ashley. The Prince luxuriated in his sense of isolation. His staff, he told Freda Dudley Ward, was 'the finest ground possible for foul and bloody gossip and scandal!! . . . They do their utmost to make life hell for me instead of helping me.'³ Before the tour was over Halsey offered his resignation on the grounds that he felt he had lost the Prince's confidence. 'How right he is, isn't he, my precious angel, though I said it was all rot . . . He knows better now than to say a word to me about TOI or anything private as he knows I would fire him on the spot.'⁴ Already the Prince's reluctance to allow even the most trusted members of his staff to talk to him about what he considered his private life was becoming more marked. Godfrey Thomas no longer dared speak with the freedom he had enjoyed in the past, Claud Hamilton was to lose his job when he trespassed on forbidden territory. The Prince's attitude, strengthened to the point of paranoia, was to make it impossible for those who worked for him to do their duty properly in the years before the abdication.

His alienation from his regular staff became more complete when Captain Edward 'Fruity' Metcalfe was recruited to look after the Prince's polo and other equine diversions. Metcalfe was charming and impecunious; an Irishman who had won a good MC in the war and held important posts in three princely states. He

- 136⁵ Stamfordham to Cromer. 11 Aug 1921. Cromer papers.
- 136⁶ 8 Nov 1921. Dudley Ward papers.
- 136⁷ E to Queen Mary. 24 Nov 1921. RA GV EE 3.
- 137¹ Windsor. *A King's Story*. p164.
- 137² Stamfordham to Cromer. 11 Aug 1921. Cromer papers.
- 137³ Cromer to Wigram. 26 Nov 1921. RA GV GG 6.
- 137⁴ Donaldson. *Edward VIII*. p96.
- 137⁵ 5 Feb 1922. RA DW 2383.
- 137⁶ *Diaries of Lord Louis Mountbatten*. p239.
- 137⁷ E to Freda Dudley Ward. 5 Jan 1922. Dudley Ward papers.
- 137⁸ *Diaries of Lord Louis Mountbatten*. pp189-90.
- 137⁹ E to Freda Dudley Ward. 11 Dec 1921. Dudley Ward papers.
- 138¹ E to Freda Dudley Ward. 25 Feb 1922. Dudley Ward papers.
- 138² *Life of General Lord Rawlinson. From his Journals and Letters*. Ed., Major-General Sir Frederick Maurice. London, 1928. p301.
- 138³ 11 Dec 1921. Dudley Ward papers.
- 138⁴ Halsey to Lascelles. 1 March 1922. Lascelles papers. 3/5/6.
- 138⁵ E to George V. 16 Dec 1921. RA DW 2380.
- 138⁶ *Diaries of Lord Louis Mountbatten*. p263.
- 139¹ 6 March 1922. Dudley Ward papers.
- 139² Piers Legh to Lord Newton. 19 March 1922. Legh papers.
- 139³ E to Freda Dudley Ward. 11 March 1922. Dudley Ward papers; and to Queen Mary. 31 Dec 1921. RA GV EE 3.
- 139⁴ E to George V. 16 Dec 1921. RA DW 2380.
- 139⁵ Piers Legh to Lord Newton. 2 Feb 1922. Legh papers.
- 139⁶ E to Freda Dudley Ward. 16 Dec 1921. Dudley Ward papers.
- 140¹ E to Reading. 28 Dec 1921. Copy in Waley. *Montagu*. pp263-6; cf E to George V. 16 Dec 1921. RA DW 2380.
- 140² 22 Dec 1921. Dudley Ward papers.
- 140³ Reading to E. 9 Jan 1922. RA POW PS Tours India 1921-2.
- 140⁴ Reading to Montagu. 16 Feb 1922. IO EUR E 238/4/4.
- 140⁵ Surgeon-Commander Newport to Cromer. 26 Feb 1922. Cromer papers.
- 140⁶ Birdwood. *Khaki and Gown*. p368.
- 140⁷ E to Freda Dudley Ward. 23 March 1922. Dudley Ward papers.
- 141¹ E and Godfrey Thomas to Queen Mary. 13 Feb 1922. RA GV EE 3.
- 141² Cromer to Wigram. 25 Dec 1921. Cromer papers.
- 141³ Legh to Lord Newton. 29 Dec 1921 and 18 Jan 1922. Legh papers.
- 141⁴ E to Freda Dudley Ward. 2 Dec 1921 and 6 Jan 1922. Dudley Ward papers.
- 141⁵ 21 Dec 1921. RA DW 2383.

Notes

- 141⁶ Stamfordham to Cromer. 13 Dec 1921. RA GV 31539.
- 141⁷ Cromer to Stamfordham. 6 Jan 1922. RA GV 31539.
- 142¹ 14 Oct 1921. Cromer papers.
- 142² E to Freda Dudley Ward. 23 Jan 1922. Dudley Ward papers.
- 142³ E to Freda Dudley Ward. 6 Feb 1922. Dudley Ward papers.
- 142⁴ E to Freda Dudley Ward. 4 June 1922. Dudley Ward papers.
- 143¹ 5 March 1922. RA GV EE 3.
- 143² Halsey to Lascelles. 1 March 1922. Lascelles papers. 3/5/6.
- 143³ Windsor. *Family Album*. p92.
- 143⁴ 15 Sept 1922. Metcalfe papers.
- 143⁵ 24 Nov 1921. IO EUR E 238/3/33.
- 143⁶ 25 Nov 1921. Cromer papers.
- 143⁷ 22 Nov 1921. Dudley Ward papers.
- 144¹ 16 Feb 1922. IO EUR E 316/2/8.
- 144² Reading to Montagu. 23 Feb 1922. IO EUR E 238/4/5.
- 144³ E to Freda Dudley Ward. 16 Feb 1922. Dudley Ward papers.
- 144⁴ Sir Almeric Fitzroy. *Memoirs*. Vol II. London, 1926. p780.
- 144⁵ Viscount Peel to Reading. 6 April 1922. IO EUR E 238/5/2.
- 144⁶ 2 April 1922. RA DW 2436.
- 145¹ Eliot to Curzon. 1 May 1922. IO MSS EUR F 112/224a.
- 145² Eliot to Curzon. 23 May 1922. IO MSS EUR F 112/224a.
- 145³ 20 April 1922. Dudley Ward papers.
- 145⁴ E to Queen Mary. 16 April 1922. RA GV EE 3.
- 145⁵ 22 April 1922. RA DW 2444.
- 145⁶ E to Queen Mary. 16 April 1922. RA GV EE 3.
- 145⁷ Eliot to Curzon. 23 May 1922. IO MSS EUR F 112/224a.
- 146¹ 13 April 1922. Dudley Ward papers.
- 146² Thomas to Queen Mary. 22 April 1922. RA GV EE 3.
- 146³ Eliot to Curzon. 23 May 1922. IO MSS EUR F 112/224a.
- 146⁴ Eliot to George V. 27 April 1922. RA GV P 510/23.
- 146⁵ Eliot to Curzon. 1 May 1922. IO MSS EUR F 112/224a.
- 146⁶ Eliot to Curzon. 1 May 1922. IO MSS EUR F 112/224a.
- 147¹ Eliot to Curzon. 1 May 1922. IO MSS EUR F 112/224a.
- 147² Eliot to Curzon. 23 May 1922. IO MSS EUR F 112/224a.