# The Old World and the New

In the Amphitheatre (Delhi Durbar)
Their Excellencies Lord and Lady Northcote and Bombay Chiefs.
Illustrator: Bourne and Shepherd, 1 January, 1903.
The British Library O/OC 430/78(30)

# The Old World and the New: The Marriage and Colonial Adventures of Lord and Lady Northcote

By

Elizabeth Taylor

CAMBRIDGE SCHOLARS

PUBLISHING

The Old World and the New:
The Marriage and Colonial Adventures of Lord and Lady Northcote,
by Elizabeth Taylor

This book first published 2013

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library



ISBN (10): 1-4438-4735-6, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-4735-3

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

# FOREWORD

This book is a biographical study of two Victorian era aristocrats who began an eight-year career in colonial government at the beginning of the twentieth century. In telling their story I examine their lives in England, and explore their involvement in the workings of the British Empire in the two different colonies, India and Australia, in which they served.

No biography has previously been written on the subject of either Harry or Alice Northcote. Alice has been virtually ignored by historians, a discovery I made when I began a doctorate with the intention of studying the Royal Exhibition Building in Melbourne, which had just been granted World Heritage status. I came across an exhibition of women's work held there in 1907, which, I soon realised, contained ambiguities and a dissonance between its stated objectives and the actual exhibits. My curiosity having been aroused, I tried to find out more about the exhibition's instigator, Alice Northcote, the wife of the Governor General. I found that the archive contained almost nothing about her. Her husband too, is sidelined in the history books, despite having been Governor General of Australia for a significant part of the decade following federation.

This can be explained as far as Alice is concerned. Her birth and early life were obscure and undocumented, and she and Harry had no children who, had they existed, might have kept archival material. Alice herself left no diaries or journals and very few letters: so few that it almost seems as though she requested that all her communications be destroyed. The lack of previous interest in Harry is more perplexing; the primary source archive on his life is much more extensive.

So a study of these two lives began with two different methodological conundrums. The first involved finding a way of discovering Alice: of learning about her obliquely through letters written to her, references in the press, comments about her in Harry's correspondence, and information obtained from letters between intermediaries referring to her.

The biographical challenge as far as Harry was concerned related to the interpretation of his letters: a key source of information. The historian is provided with information about a letter writer's world; but it is not unmediated. The version given in letters of the writer's reality depends on

his perceptions of the recipient. The story can also change when the letter writer is peddling a version of events or feelings he wishes to be recorded and preserved. In this context – although not exclusively in this context – letters can be an attempt to self-define. The fact that Harry's letters have survived in the archives of their various recipients does not apparently owe anything to effort by Harry to preserve them. There is no evidence to suggest that he had posterity in mind.

A focus on individuals can throw light on political and social history. Several aspects of the Northcotes' story illustrate subjects of interest to historian and general reader alike. These include the parliamentary careers of Harry and his father, Lord Iddesleigh, at a momentous time in British political history; the extraordinary social mobility of Alice's adoptive father, Lord Mount Stephen, and indeed of Alice herself; Harry's colonial service in different sites of Empire; Alice's exemplary performance as Governor's wife, "incorporated" in her husband's career.

Women are still relatively invisible in the record of the British Empire. There has been a comparatively recent revolution in most scholarly thinking on the impact of gender on colonial structures - the discourse does not only focus now on the political and military exploits of white pioneering men - but there are still aspects of colonial history that underplay the contribution of women.

One does not have to approve of the nature of this contribution in order to acknowledge its importance. I dwell in this book in some detail on the three principal so-called "trivial" activities engaged in by elite women in the colonies: the production of a white domesticity, status maintenance and philanthropy. These pursuits carried the culture of the Mother Country, particularly its class system, into the far reaches of the Empire. The study of the interdependent marriage of an elite couple in two colonial settings will justifiably give attention to the female activities that achieved this transmission of culture.

I am necessarily aware of the need to be mindful of the ethical dilemmas inherent in writing about other people's lives. There is the risk of being intrusively voyeuristic; there are pitfalls resulting from the fact that biographers inevitably see the subject of study through the distorting cultural lens of their own era; there is the danger of being falsifyingly simplistic, of looking for a satisfyingly, but unrealistically, coherent self, an elusive "truth" that may not exist. In Alice's case this trap is perhaps more easily avoided: she was a person without a family narrative through which to construct herself initially, and who altered her identity through her life according to circumstances.

The reader will notice that I refer to my subjects as “Harry” and “Alice”. They themselves, because they were true children of their age, were formal in address. Harry, writing to his close friend, William Selborne, opened letters with “Dear Willy”, but signed “Northcote” at the end. Alice, even when pouring out her grief to Alfred Deakin after Harry’s death, addressed him as “Mr. Deakin” and always signed herself “Alice S. Northcote”. Presumably letters between the couple would have been an exception to this, but I have not found a single letter written by one to the other. Despite the Northcotes’ own formality, and my information having been obtained from many sources, by no means all of them private, I have chosen an informal mode of naming them. This reflects my desire to present them in as personal a light as the sources allow, and this in turn results from the regard and affection I have come to feel for them.

It has been a salutary experience observing people I believe to have been intelligent (and in Harry’s case, relatively reflective), well intentioned and humane, who nevertheless subscribed wholeheartedly to the predominant imperial ideology; and who therefore participated uncritically in the colonial rule that we see differently now.

I am left with an increased awareness of the danger inherent in being caught up unthinkingly in the ethos of the day. I am reminded that good people can be involved in morally questionable endeavours because they accept a prevailing orthodoxy which tells them that this is what they should think, and therefore what they should do. Our own times and our own culture are not immune from such danger.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The generosity of a number of people who have given their time and effort to help someone else's project has been a heart-warming (and unexpected) benefit of writing this book and the thesis that preceded it.

I must above all thank Professor Patricia Grimshaw, without whose erudition and encouragement I doubt I would have made it to the writing of this acknowledgement. My grandson, William Clark, aged twelve, has been a constant source of support: he has offered me interest in the subject, technical help, and valuable assistance with research, particularly family research on the internet. My fifteen year old granddaughter, Martha, is the artist responsible for the beautiful drawings on the front cover and at the beginning of Chapter 7. I thank both William and Martha for their help, always willingly given. I also owe a special debt of gratitude to Alexander Reford, a Canadian descendent of Lord Mount Stephen's sister, who trawled family records and contributed a significant amount of archival material.

Several others have made important contributions to my research over seven years. I offer thanks to Doreen Henry and Barbara Johnson at the Victoria League in London, who made great efforts to help me find references in their archives. The staff in the Pictures and Manuscripts department at the National Library of Australia in Canberra, under Marie-Louise Ayres, made a recent second visit there a delightful and productive experience. Colin Harris at the Bodleian in Oxford was forthcoming beyond the call of duty during an extended visit a few years ago. My sister, Claire, and her husband, Alan, have willingly and enthusiastically made visits to Exeter University Library to research images for the book and have visited churches in Devon on my behalf. Jon and Kate Tilley, and Geoff and Heather Chambers, the joint owners of Pynes, have been very generous, showing me over the house and contributing photographs for use in the book.

A number of other individual scholars and librarians have given me valuable advice: Dr. Nicola Thomas of the University of Exeter, Professor Penny Russell of the University of Sydney, Professor Melanie Oppenheimer of the University of New England; Elizabeth Willis at Melbourne Museum; Zoe Lubowiecka at Hove Rare Materials Library in Sussex; Lola Armstrong at Clandeboyes in Northern Ireland, custodian of

the Dufferin archives; Moira Ludgrove, archivist at Barings Archive in the City of London; Vicki Perry at the private library of the current Lord Salisbury at Hatfield House; too many librarians to mention individually at the State Library of Victoria, Exeter University Library, and, of course, the British Library. Sean Lang, Maneesha Lal, Martha Sear, and Nigel Keohane are individual scholars who have been especially helpful.

Last, I would like to thank the rest of my dear family: Michael, for advice that is always both generous and incisive; my daughter, Rachel, for her encouragement and enthusiasm, and her example; my son-in-law, Ian, for absolutely essential assistance with the technical aspects of this production; my niece, Hannah, who helped with the process of keeping copies of every chapter on the other side of the world. Each one has made a much valued contribution of one kind or another, enabling me to fulfill the requirements of this demanding project.

# INTRODUCTION

# LORD AND LADY NORTHCOTE: A NEW CENTURY AND A NEW BEGINNING

## It is November 1899

A momentous century is almost over. The great Victorian era is fast approaching its end: the aged Queen has a mere fourteen months left to live. But the British Empire is still in its prime, still sending its soldiers, administrators and its Governors out to rule in almost every part of the globe, still supremely self-confident and oblivious to the straws in the wind that begin to give indication of changes that the new century will bring.

On 9 November in Bombay, Lord Curzon, Viceroy of India and fervent advocate of the power and invincibility of the Raj, brings to the notice of the world the appointment of Sir Henry Northcote to the Governorship of Bombay. Behind this routine announcement lies a drama – long in the making but shockingly swift in the coming – involving landed aristocrats, Victorian politicians and *nouveaux riches* entrepreneurs. This drama has at its centre a couple whose abilities and ambitions are as yet unfulfilled and unrecognised: Harry and Alice Northcote.

This man and woman personify two crucial strands in British Victorian society: the old established rural aristocracy on the one hand, and rich *arrivistes* on the other. Members of the latter group often hail from the New World, and they inject vital new blood and equally vital new cash into tired old families with impeccable credentials and leaking roofs.

Harry Northcote is a scion of a family characterised more by solid respectability than by glamour. He is Member of Parliament for Exeter, a city close to the family seat, Pynes, in the English county of Devon. Northcotes have lived in the area since 1086, and descend from an uncle of William the Conqueror. Harry's father, the first Lord Iddesleigh, was a player in the national political game, falling just short of becoming Prime Minister when he was outwitted by the wily Lord Salisbury in 1885. And

perhaps as just punishment to Salisbury, Iddesleigh keeled over and died a year later in the anteroom to the Prime Minister's office; almost in his arms.

Alice's history mirrors the "rags to riches" story of her larger-than-life adoptive father, Lord George Mount Stephen. He was born to a poor Scottish crofter and, via outstanding entrepreneurial success in Canada, mainly in founding the Canadian Pacific Railway, was ennobled, and became master of a stately home, Brocket Hall, at which he entertains royalty.

Alice's parentage remains unknown. She was adopted in her teens by George Stephen and his wife, Annie, and became a substantial heiress. In her early twenties she married Harry, a sprig of the English political aristocracy. She became close to her father-in-law, Lord Iddesleigh, and after his death, increasingly, and obsessively, attached to her adoptive father. Lord Mount Stephen is a charismatic figure, with a buoyant and optimistic charm, who, it is said, turns all heads when dressed in an opera cloak.

In November 1897, soon after Annie's death, Lord Mount Stephen married Gian, a woman younger than his adoptive daughter. When, in September this year, Gian's pregnancy was announced, Alice knew that she was effectively supplanted in all capacities. She is distraught at the prospect of remaining in close contact with the happy couple. Her considerate husband has sought a means of removing her from this predicament, and at the same time has found a route to fulfilling his own ambition.

Thus begins a career in colonial government for the two Northcotes, both able at last to use talents hitherto unrealised.

# DRAMATIS PERSONAE

HENRY (HARRY) STAFFORD NORTHCOTE, Baron Northcote of Exeter.
ALICE STEPHEN NORTHCOTE, Baroness Northcote.

## England 1846–1934

STAFFORD HENRY NORTHCOTE, 1st Earl of Iddesleigh. British Politician. Father of Harry.
CECILIA NORTHCOTE, Countess of Iddesleigh. Mother of Harry.
WALTER NORTHCOTE, 2nd Lord Iddesleigh. Brother of Harry.
GEORGE STEPHEN, 1st Baron Mount Stephen. Adoptive father of Alice.
ANNIE STEPHEN, Baroness Mount Stephen. Adoptive mother of Alice.
GIAN STEPHEN, Baroness Mount Stephen. Second wife of George Stephen.
GASPARD FARRER. Merchant banker. Friend and protégée of George Stephen.
VICTOR CHILD VILLIERS, 7th Earl of Jersey. Friend of the Northcotes and Governor of New South Wales 1891–1893.
MARGARET CHILD VILLIERS, Countess of Jersey. Close friend of Alice.
WILLIAM PALMER, 2nd Earl of Selborne. Politician. Close friend of Harry.
MAUD PALMER, Countess of Selborne. Daughter of Lord Salisbury. Friend of Alice.
GARNET WOLSELEY, Viscount Wolseley. Soldier. Friend of George Stephen and the Northcotes.
LOUISA, Viscountess Wolseley.
FRANCES WOLSELEY. Garnet and Louisa's daughter.
WILLIAM BLACKWOOD. Publisher of *Blackwood's Magazine*: produced by the Blackwood family between 1817 and 1980, and originally conceived as a conservative rival to the *Edinburgh Review*, which supported the Whigs. Friend of Harry.
ROBERT GASCOYNE-CECIL, 3rd Marquess of Salisbury. Prime Minister 1885 – January 1886; July 1886–1892; 1895–1902.
GEORGINA GASCOYNE-CECIL, Marchioness of Salisbury.
WILLIAM EWART GLADSTONE. Prime Minister 1868–1874; 1880–1885; February–July 1886; 1892–1894.
ARTHUR BALFOUR, 1st Earl of Balfour. Nephew of Lord Salisbury. Prime Minister 1902–1905.

LORD GEORGE HAMILTON. Secretary of State for India 1885–1903.
JOSEPH CHAMBERLAIN. Secretary of State for the Colonies 1895–1903.
ALFRED LYTTELTON. Secretary of State for the Colonies 1903–1905.
VICTOR BRUCE, 9th Earl of Elgin. Secretary of State for the Colonies 1905–1908.
EDWARD GREY, 1st Viscount Grey of Fallodon, Foreign Secretary 1905–1916. He is attributed with the words spoken on the outbreak of the Great War in 1914: "the lamps are going out all over Europe. We shall not see them lit again in our time".
PRINCESS LOUISE MARGARET, Duchess of Connaught. Her husband, Prince Arthur, was the third son of Queen Victoria. Friend of Alice.
PRINCESS HELENA, Duchess of Albany. She married Prince Leopold, youngest son of Queen Victoria, who died relatively young as a result of his inherited haemophilia. Friend of Alice.
HORATIO HERBERT KITCHENER, 1st Earl Kitchener of Khartoum. Soldier. Friend of Alice.
JOSEPH CONRAD. Author. Friend of Alice.

## Canada 1873–1908

GOLDWIN SMITH. Academic. Harry's best man at the Northcotes' wedding in 1873. Friend of George Mount Stephen.
SIR JOHN MACDONALD. Prime Minister of Canada 1867–1873 and 1878–1891. Friend and business associate of Mount Stephen.
ELSIE MEIGHEN. George Stephen's sister; she and her husband, Robert, bought his house in Rue Drummond, Montreal.

## India 1900–1903

GEORGE CURZON, 1st Marquess Curzon of Kedleston. Viceroy of India 1899–1905.
MARY, Marchioness Curzon.
OLIVER RUSSELL, 2nd Baron Ampthill. Governor of Madras 1900–1906.
WILLIAM MANSFIELD, 1st Viscount Sandhurst. Governor of Bombay 1895–1900.
CHARLES COCHRANE-BAILLIE, 2nd Baron Lamington. Governor of Queensland 1896–1901. Governor of Bombay 1903–1907.
CLAUDE HILL. Secretary to Harry in Bombay.
ANTONY MACDONNELL, 1st Baron MacDonnell. President of Indian Famine Commission 1901.

SIR JAMES MONTEATH. Acting Governor of Bombay, September–December 1903.

## Australia 1904–1923

JOHN HOPE, 7th Earl of Hopetoun, (later 1st Marquess Linlithgow). Governor of Victoria 1889–1895. First Governor General 1900–1902.
HERSEY, Countess of Hopetoun.
HALLAM, 2nd Baron Tennyson. Governor of South Australia 1899–1902. Second Governor General 1902–1904.
AUDREY, Baroness Tennyson.
WILLIAM WARD, 2nd Earl of Dudley. Governor General 1908–1911.
RACHEL, Countess of Dudley.
GERTRUDE, Baronesss Denman. Wife of Thomas Denman, 3rd Baron Denman, Governor General 1911–1914.
LADY HELEN MUNRO FERGUSON. Daughter of Lady Dufferin, wife of Sir Ronald Munro Ferguson, Governor General 1914–1920.
THEO HEIDE. Manager of First Australian Exhibition of Women's Work.
SIR REGINALD TALBOT. Governor of Victoria 1904–1908.
LADY MARGARET TALBOT.
SIR HARRY RAWSON. Governor of New South Wales 1902–1909.
SIR THOMAS BENT. Premier of Victoria 1904–1909.
SIR GEORGE REID. Prime Minister 1904–1905. High Commissioner for Australia in London 1910–1916.
ALFRED DEAKIN. Prime Minister 1904–1909. Close friend of the Northcotes.
PATTIE DEAKIN. Friend of Alice.
CHRIS WATSON. First Labor Prime Minister, April–August 1904.
WILLIAM (BILLY) HUGHES. Prime Minister 1915–1923.

# CHAPTER ONE

# HARRY NORTHCOTE:
# THE CREATION OF AN ENGLISH POLITICIAN

"Pynes", from Jon and Kate Tilley and Geoff and Heather Chambers, owners of Pynes.

"He has plenty of natural ability … but … if he won't speak, he cannot hope to be employed."[1]

## The Northcote Family

The Northcotes have lived in the Exeter area in the English county of Devon for nine hundred years, and are still there. Their family seat, Pynes, built to the designs of Inigo Jones, and set in a well-wooded park on rolling hills, was sold at the very end of the twentieth century, but the current Lord Iddesleigh and his family remain in the district.

The aristocratic family into which Henry Stafford Northcote was born in London on 18 November 1846 had been long established within the

[1] Lord Wolseley to his wife, 24 May, 1891, WP, 3/203.

landed gentry. Henry, known as Harry, was the second son in a family of seven sons and three daughters.[2] His parents were Sir Stafford Henry Northcote, later first Earl of Iddesleigh, and his wife, Cecilia, herself of aristocratic lineage.

The Northcotes could trace their ancestry back to John of Gaunt, and to William the Conqueror. Galfridas Miles, in direct line of ancestry to subsequent Northcotes, was related to the Conqueror through Drogo, his uncle, who was the son of an uncle of King William. Drogo held the Manors of Northcote from 1086.

Despite changes resulting from the loss of the family house by fire and the selling of some of the Northcote Manor land during the time of Sir Henry Northcote in the early eighteenth century, the Northcotes' allegiance to the area has remained unbroken. They periodically took on responsible local commitments such as the job of Sheriff – for example, John de Northcote became Sheriff in 1354 – and Justice at Quarter Sessions, while another John became a Justice of the Peace late in the sixteenth century. Lord Wolseley, a family friend, suggested that the Northcotes became rich "by the woollen trade which flourished in the neighbourhood of Crediton in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries".[3] They occasionally had a hand in national affairs. John, the first baronet, distinguished himself in 1641 by attempting to lessen the difficulties existing between Charles 1 and those opposing him in the House of Commons.

At the time of Harry's birth and upbringing the Northcotes were numbered among the 6,000 families at the bottom of the pyramid that made up the landed establishment, the totality of which constituted an almost unchallengeable concentration of wealth and power. Harry's family held 5,663 acres at the turn of the century; the Northcotes fell easily into the gentry category, narrowly defined as a family with more than a couple of thousand acres. The Northcote family was further ennobled when Sir Stafford Northcote became the Earl of Iddesleigh and Viscount St Cyres (hereditary titles) in 1885.

Harry, as second son, had to earn his own titles. He had a Baronetcy conferred upon him in November 1887, and was eventually raised to the

[2] Walter Stafford born 1845, Henry Stafford (Harry) born 1846, John Stafford born 1850, Arthur Francis born 1852, Hugh Oliver born 1854, Edward Louis born 1857 (died aged 15), Amyas Stafford born 1864; three daughters, birth dates not known: Agnes Mary Cecilia, Mabel (died in infancy) and Margaret Stafford.

[3] Wolseley to his wife, 11 November, 1890. Quoted in Arthur, Sir George, ed. *The Letters of Lord and Lady Wolseley 1870–1911* (New York: Doubleday, Page and Co., 1922), 273.

peerage and made a Baron of the United Kingdom in 1900. He gained his own honours by merit too: he was appointed Knight Commander of the Indian Empire by Queen Victoria and to the Order of St. Michael and St. George by King Edward VII.

The other sons of the family, apart from the heir, Walter, were mildly downwardly mobile. Two of them, John and Arthur, had undistinguished ecclesiastical careers, although John did become honorary chaplain to King George V. The two daughters took on the class of their husbands – a Scottish aristocrat and son of a Baronet respectively – giving them comparable status to that of their father. The fact that it was Harry, rather than any of the other children (especially rather than Walter, the heir), who left a legacy of substantial achievement, indicates his ability and his status in the family as heir to his father's talents.

Stafford Northcote, the first Lord Iddesleigh, rose to high office, becoming Chancellor of the Exchequer (1874–1880), First Lord of the Treasury (1885–1886) and Foreign Secretary (1886–1887). Stafford reached these heights of the British political system and only just fell short of the peak when he failed to become Prime Minister. When the Conservatives regained power in 1885 he was shunted off into the House of Lords as "the only decent way of removing him from the leadership", as Justin McCarthy, a contemporary writer, put it, and Lord Salisbury "seized the prize".[4] Historians have generally seen Stafford as a politician who ultimately failed because of a lack of political virility. Gladstone thought him weak as water, and he has been further described as monotonously conciliatory and hapless.

This pejorative view was contested by his biographer and contemporary, Andrew Lang,[5] and another contemporary, Lady Mary St. Helier, who speaks in her memoir, written in 1909, of his "calm and judicial mind and his judgement and sagacity".[6] The perception of Stafford as essentially impotent politically has been challenged recently by Nigel Keohane, who comments on both the political motives behind contemporary adverse

[4] McCarthy, Justin, *A History of Our Own Times: from the Accession of Queen Victoria to the Diamond Jubilee 1897, Vol. III* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1905).

[5] Lang, Andrew, *Life, Letters and Diaries of Sir Stafford Northcote, the First Earl of Iddesleigh* (Edinburgh: W.Blackwood, 1890). Vols. 1 and 2 republished by Elibron Classics, 2007.

[6] St. Helier, Lady Mary, *Memories of Fifty Years* (London: Edward Arnold, 1909), 258.

views, and the complexity of the situation in which Northcote, as he then was, was enmeshed.[7]

But it is of interest to see his second son as a politician with a similar family characteristic: a lack of ruthless, self-seeking drive and ambition. Other related traits were inherited too. Both Stafford and Harry were conscientious and virtuous, and in the eyes of some, dull. Neither man was charismatic. The Gladstone family referred to Stafford as "poor Sir Stuffy", and Lady Gladstone said that he was small and fussy. Justin McCarthy said that Stafford's "manner wanted strength, his voice wanted strength".

One can understand Stafford's value to the Conservative Party; Disraeli described Stafford as its "respectability", and this was an essential quality for a party sometimes identified with raffish values rather than with high-minded civic duty. Stafford remained principled and high-minded, even when forced from office: an event that happened just before, and may have contributed to, his death. "His conscience was very active", McCarthy commented, and apparently he was wont to apologise for his mistakes, a characteristic that did not appeal to members of the House of Commons, who liked their politicians to be "cocksure". "Sir Stafford was not cocksure about anything", said McCarthy.

Harry was not imbued with hubristic confidence either, and he too exhibited high mindedness in his dealings, correspondence and speeches, usually with a leavening of realism, even a cynicism, which was absent from Stafford's dealings with the world. In a mention of the Dreyfus case in a letter to his friend, Lord Selborne in 1898, Harry began his comment with the words: "I suspect Dreyfus was guilty; I can't believe such infamy as that of knowingly consigning an innocent man to a fate worse than death", then continued with a cynical addendum: "one (a fate) from which he might escape, and then return, and publish the real truth".[8]

Harry also leavened his speeches and correspondence with a dry humour, one not observable in the writings of his father. In Harry's obituary in *The Times* the newspaper illustrated both Harry's humour and a self-deprecation shared by his father. Mentioning Harry's job as Surveyor–General of Ordnance, *The Times* said that "he was never under

[7] Keohane, Nigel, "The Lost Leader: Sir Stafford Northcote and the Leadership of the Conservative party 1876-1885", *Parliamentary History*, 27, 3, October, 2008, 361-379.
[8] Harry to Lord Selborne, 10 January, 1898, SP 29.

any illusion about the uselessness of the post … and was wont to tell amusing stories about it".[9]

Both Harry and his father had a social conscience. We observe Harry's in his writings and his actions in Bombay, and Stafford was quoted by Lang as making a number of concerned comments on the plight of the poor, such as: "the evil in Ireland is that the great mass of the poor never have any money to lay out to buy food". Lang commented on Stafford's kindness, and we can see Harry's concern for others in letters such as one to Lord Wolseley in 1887 on behalf of a subordinate: "Alderson takes things so much to heart that if you can put something on record that you are satisfied with his explanations he will sleep happier".[10]

Lang's description of Stafford's intelligence could also have applied to Harry's: "an intellect admirably disciplined rather than vivid and original", as could Keohane's of Stafford as having an obtuse devotion to detail. Many of Harry's speeches in the House of Commons were concerned with procedural matters and careful detail, verging on minutiae. Both men were well educated, hardly surprising in view of their class, but they had taken advantage of their elite education. Stafford was complimented by Lady Dorothy Nevill in 1912 when she commented that he was well known for his familiarity with the great Latin and Greek writers. His son's knowledge and erudition were exhibited in his articles for *Blackwoods Magazine*.

The magazine *Review of Reviews*, describing the incoming Governor General of Australia in 1904, summed up Harry's sterling qualities, and mentioned his inheritance. The article said that he was a "steady stager, a hard worker and a conscientious administrator" who would be "as incapable of converting his official position into a pedestal for self-display as he is of petty intrigue or personal meanness" and who "was born so, for he is the true son of his father".[11]

## Fledgling Politician

Harry was educated at Eton, where he was apparently a happy and moderately successful pupil. A letter from his father to a friend (Lord Coleridge) in 1860 gave a picture of an intelligent, but somewhat lazy and moody boy, not unusual characteristics for a fifteen year old. Speaking of his sons, particularly Harry and Walter, Stafford wrote:

[9] *The Times*, 30 September, 1911, 11.
[10] Harry to Wolseley, 8 January, 1887, WP, 3/203.
[11] *Review of Reviews*, 20 January, 1904.

> "the eldest is indolent. The second son is idle. They are not hard workers; they do just enough to maintain creditable positions; are well spoken of by their tutors and seem to be liked by the boys … Harry is a very peculiar boy, and I am far more anxious about his temper and general character than about his learning".

But Stafford was optimistic about Harry's progress at Eton:

> "Eton has done and is doing him incalculable good. He has been idle under all systems, partly because he is so exceedingly quick; but at home he becomes unhappy, moody, discontented, and unwilling to join in any amusements, while at Eton he 'comes out' in the most striking manner".[12]

A year later Stafford had revised his opinion of Harry – perhaps Harry had grown out of his minor adolescent rebellion – and wrote, again to Coleridge, that his son was

> "a boy of fair average abilities, a remarkable memory, and with taste somewhat more refined than most boys of his age … a boy who has never misconducted himself, has been rather a favourite with his tutor, has had no impediments in respect of his health, has not been given extravagantly over to society, or to games, is fond of reading, has a great deal of (self acquired) knowledge of the politics and general affairs of the day, writes English well".

The immediate reason for this enthusiastic list of virtues was Stafford's annoyance at having asked Harry's tutor for a testimonial on the occasion of Harry's having chosen to enter himself for Bailliol College, Oxford, and having received in response "something like a lecture for my presumption for thinking such a destiny for him".[13]

Harry eventually attended Merton College, Oxford, where he had a reasonably successful academic career. The *Bombay Gazette* commented thirty-five years later that he had concentrated on the modern instead of the classical side of Oxford studies. He had by this time developed a work ethic: his father wrote to Cecilia in 1868: "Harry seems very bright, and is working hard for his degree, sitting up till 2 or 3 in the morning".[14]

Harry demonstrated his continuing diligence, intellectual capacity, and lack of pretension, when he entered the Foreign Office by examination in

[12] Stafford to Coleridge, 6 November, 1860, NP (Ex), 81, 13–14.
[13] Stafford to Coleridge, 2 December, 1861, NP (Ex), 81, 13–14.
[14] Stafford to Cecilia, 7 November, 1868, NP (Ex), 81, 13–14.

1868. Several years later, in 1871, Harry assisted his father, who acted as a member of the Joint High Commission during a visit to the United States to negotiate the Treaty of Washington. Harry became Private Secretary to Lord Salisbury in 1876, accompanying him in December of that year, as one of four secretaries, to the Constantinople Conference, convened in an attempt to bring resolution to the vexed Bulgarian question and to avert a threatened Russian-Turkish war.

Experience of a different kind, in domestic rather than international politics, followed. Harry acted as assistant Private Secretary to his father from 1877 until 1880 while Stafford was Chancellor of the Exchequer and Leader of the House of Commons. Henry was himself elected as Conservative Member of Parliament for Exeter in 1880. He was close to his father professionally for the rest of Stafford's life, although there were differences between them in aspects of their political perspectives. Both men were conventional thinkers, and these variations in their belief structures reflected differences in the generally prevailing view of their respective generations, and primarily related to their view of the imperial mission. I will examine this more closely in the chapter on Harry's experience in Bombay.

Father and son were personally close. Stafford's letters to Harry were warm, friendly and affectionate, and, illustrating the interests that father and son shared, characterised by a matter of fact emphasis on giving instructions ("would you look at") and discussing the concerns of the day ("I should like to know what Bismarck is up to").[15] The Iddesleigh collection in the British Library contains correspondence that begins with a touching letter from Stafford to seven-year-old Harry on his birthday in 1853:

> "I hope and pray that you will have a long and happy life, and that you will grow up to be a good man, having the love of God and your friends. What you will become as a man depends very much on what you are as a boy".[16]

Stafford's concern, affection and regard for Harry were often displayed, as in a letter to Alice written in 1881 when he said: "I must send you one line of congratulation on Harry's speech last night, which was a highly successful one – well reasoned, well expressed and pleasantly delivered". Stafford stated that although Harry had been nervous his speech was "much better than a showy or flash one".[17] In 1883 he wrote: "Harry told

[15] Stafford to Harry, 14 January, (no year), IP, 50032.
[16] Stafford to Harry, 18 November, 1853, IP, 50032.
[17] Stafford to Alice, 25 March, 1881, IP, 50032.

you all there was to be told, except his own praises, which it would take me too long to write fully".[18]

The regard was mutual; Harry appeared to revere his father. He wrote to Selborne in 1895 that "God sends such men as our fathers to be lights in the world – to teach us how to labour so as to set an example of high mindedness of Christian charity to all men".[19] He reversed his names to become Sir Stafford Henry Northcote, the same name as his father, when he became a Baronet shortly after his father's death, and was known as Sir Stafford until he became Lord Northcote, when he reverted to his own given names in their original order. Harry was often his father's companion. He accompanied Stafford on recuperative holidays; "I go off next week to nurse my father, who is seriously amiss", he wrote to William Blackwood in November 1882.[20]

Harry was a key player in the drama surrounding Lord Iddesleigh's sudden death in Lord Salisbury's office in January 1887. Harry was sent for immediately his father was taken ill. Lord Iddesleigh had walked to Downing Street to see Lord Salisbury and on reaching the anteroom sank into a chair where he was found, almost comatose and breathing with difficulty. He never spoke again, and died at five minutes past three. Harry, summoned from the War Office, did not arrive until ten minutes after it was all over. And it was Harry who travelled later that day to Pynes to tell Cecilia what had happened. He left Waterloo for Exeter by the 5 pm train, but was stopped at Salisbury by a telegram from his mother telling him that she had heard of her husband's death and was herself on the way to London.

Lord Iddesleigh's death followed a week after his unexpected ejection from the cabinet. There is no direct record of Harry's views on this matter. He had apparently not protested at the political shenanigans culminating in Iddesleigh's sacking, about which the family felt bitter. But the offer of a Baronetcy later in 1887 may have been not so much in recognition of his talent and previous services, as a means of keeping him quiet.

Lord Salisbury was loath to confer honours: the dramatic increase in the numbers of honours bestowed was transforming the political system, and this change was anathema to Lord Salisbury, who tended to resist democratisation and modernisation. This would indicate that in this instance he must have had an extremely guilty conscience, or genuinely

[18] Stafford to Alice, 27 January, 1883, IP, 50032.
[19] Harry to Selborne, 5 May, 1895, SP, 29.
[20] Harry to Blackwood, 5 November, 1882, WB, 4396. Stafford had been diagnosed with a weak heart in 1850.

appreciated Harry's contribution, or both. There is later evidence to indicate that Salisbury did value Harry's judgement: letters written by Salisbury to Harry while the latter was in Bombay canvassed his opinion on various domestic issues.

It is clear from correspondence between Harry and William Blackwood of *Blackwood's Magazine*,[21] for which Harry wrote a number of articles, that he was at this time closely involved behind the scenes in the affairs of government. It was evident from a covering note included with an article sent in May 1878 that the piece was based on a précis of argument written by Harry and put forward by Stafford to be distributed to Ministers as aids to debate.[22] Several other references to the fact that summing up and representing policy were part of Harry's job are found in these letters: for example, on 20 July 1878 he referred to a memorandum he had recently drawn up for the Cabinet.[23]

The articles in *Blackwood's Magazine* are themselves not only illustrative of Harry's political conservatism – the magazine was a Tory mouthpiece – but also provide evidence of a keen political intelligence and some innovative thinking. They demonstrate how very well informed Harry was on a number of issues. He wrote on subjects ranging from trade protectionism to the Afghan campaign. His interest in domestic affairs was frequently shown in both the correspondence with William Blackwood and the *Blackwood's* articles. A piece on the reform of Conservative electoral machinery illustrated his interest in the minutiae of political procedure,[24] while one called "The Whigs' Last Chance" showed his fascination with the party political game.

This article also gave voice to his lack of regard for Gladstone, who, according to Harry, "sacrifices colleague after colleague, promise after promise, principle after principle" and "yields much to pressure and little or nothing to reason".[25] Harry tended to err on the charitable side in his assessments of other politicians in his correspondence, but he did not like Gladstone (despite the fact that his father had been his Private Secretary for ten years), even commenting that "Gladstone never reads a newspaper".[26]

Harry's growing interest in the affairs of the Empire is discernable, although Canada, rather than Australia or India, engaged his attention more frequently: unsurprisingly in view of the activities of his father-in-

[21] Correspondence (MS 4363–4621) in the National Library of Scotland.
[22] Harry to Blackwood, 21 May, 1878, WB, 4380.
[23] Harry to Blackwood, 20 July, 1878, WB, 4380.
[24] *Blackwoods Magazine*, June, 1880.
[25] *Blackwoods Magazine*, August, 1882.
[26] Harry to Blackwood, 16 February, 1886, WB, 4380.

law. In a piece entitled "Work for Willing Hands: a Practical Plan for State Aided Emigration", Harry adumbrated engagingly on this theme with special reference to Canada. He would flesh out his ideas on this subject later in his career when he advocated increased population in Australia.

Despite its giving confirmation of his conventionally conservative political stance – the fact that he gave over-riding value to "law and order and the rights of property" – we see glimpses in this article of Harry's social conscience. He referred to "the gaunt spectre of famine amongst the unemployed" at home leading to the desirability of the opportunity to "utilise labour on the vast fertile plains of our colonies".[27]

A subject to which he returned in a number of articles, including in other journals (as in an article in *The Nineteenth Century* in January 1881) was Mount Stephen's Canadian Pacific Railway. Harry wrote how crucial the new railway had been to Canada's development because "prior to 1870 the country had been a *terra incognita* ruled over by the Hudson Bay Company which had concealed its vast resources in order to protect the fur trade".

Harry's belief in the British Empire's centrality in world affairs is amusingly, from a twenty first century point of view, illustrated in the article in the same edition on the subject of free trade:

> "happily for themselves, neither The United States nor Canada – except insofar as the latter forms a portion of the British Empire – has a foreign policy in the common acceptation of the term".[28]

The period Harry spent in the House of Commons between 1880 and 1899 coincided with asteep decline in the political and social dominance of the landed gentry, although it was still being claimed in the 1894 edition of *Burke's Landed Gentry* that land ownership was the principal test of rank. The decline in the political power of this class was hastened by the passing of the Third Reform and Redistribution Acts in 1884 and 1885. These comprised two complementary measures constituting the most significant political reform of the century: enlargement of the electorate from three to six million, giving substantial gains to the middle and working classes; and the redrawing of constituency boundaries, which, in increasing the representation of cities, changed the political system from a rural to an urban one.

A decline in the number of landed gentry in the House of Commons was matched by an increase in professional men, representing an increasingly

[27] *Blackwood's Magazine,* February, 1888.
[28] *Blackwood's Magazine,* January 1882.

assertive and prosperous middle class. Furthermore, 246 new titles were conferred between 1886 and 1914, and this was part of the process of the reconstitution of the traditional upper class into something closer to a plutocracy.

That the political and social transformation was carried out peacefully, and with the cooperation (albeit at times unwilling) of the social class in decline, shows not only the resilience and ingenuity of this class in reliniquishing some of its own power and absorbing new members, but also a high quality of political leadership, notwithstanding Lord Salisbury's resistance to change. Both Northcotes, father and son, were at Westminster during this crucial period.

Indeed Harry himself could be seen as a representative of a new breed: a hybrid of both aristocratic and bourgeois values. Although traditionally aristocrats had cultivated both amateurism and pursuit of leisure as defining qualities, Harry himself was imbued with the sense of duty and public responsibility that was also consistent with an aristocratic heritage. The work ethic that Harry had acquired and which would serve him well in Bombay and Australia shows the influence of bourgeois values permeating upper-class mores. A speech made by Harry before leaving for Australia in December 1903 summed up his attitude. *The Times* commented on his speech, saying that he intended to be guided in his work in Australia "by the principle which animated every civil servant – namely the desire to learn his duty and the determination to discharge it to the best of his ability".[29] The reference to the ethics and attitudes of civil servants is ample demonstration of middle-class professionalism beginning to infiltrate the job descriptions of aristocrats.

Despite his work ethic and sense of duty there was not much evidence of a progression in Harry's career before 1900. He was Financial Secretary to the War Office from June 1885 until February 1886, when the Liberals were again returned, and during Lord Salisbury's second government was Surveyor-General of the Ordnance (1886–1887). He was appointed Chairman of the Associated Chambers of Commerce, acted as a Charity Commissioner in 1891–1892 and became a Royal Commissioner for the Paris Exhibition in 1898.

But Harry held none of the great offices of state, despite considerable advantages: his family connections; his upper class credentials including education at Eton and Oxford and membership of the most influential London gentlemen's clubs – the Athenaeum, Carlton Club, St James and St Stephens – as well as the fact that he was a prominent freemason (he

[29] *The Times*, 2 December, 1903, 6.

was Provincial Grandmaster for Devonshire from 1899). Harry was further advantaged by his acquaintance with Lord Salisbury, and friendships with Salisbury's daughter, Maud, and son-in-law, Lord Selborne, a successful politician in his own right, with whom Harry had established a close friendship when they also accompanied Lord Salisbury to Constantinople.

It appears from the evidence of correspondence between Harry and Salisbury, that Harry had direct influence with those at the top, but he can be seen to have personally lacked the drive to power. Close examination of his record of participation in the affairs of the House of Commons illuminates this picture.

Speech making was not Harry's forte. His obituary in *The Times* made the comment that he was not a fluent speaker and was not at his best in public appearances. His father acknowledged in 1881 that Harry had been "fearfully nervous" before speaking in Parliament. But while Harry was employed in particular jobs he was a frequent speaker on subjects pertaining to those jobs. In 1886 and 1887, while he was Surveyor-General of the Ordnance, he spoke 153 times. All but half a dozen of these occasions were speeches directly related to the functions of his ordnance job. His nine speeches in 1892, while he was a Charity Commissioner, were all on the subject of charity. His speech making rose to a crescendo of activity during the period in the mid eighties when he was employed in what could have been seen at the time as jobs possibly leading to greater things, and during the period of his father's continuing influence.

It appears that while he saw himself as successful Harry threw himself into the job enthusiastically, but that when he felt unappreciated, and without an immediately obvious and challenging job to do, he lost heart, especially after his father's death. This view is reinforced by Lord Wolseley's comments in 1891, when he reported from Fascally, Mount Stephen's house in Scotland (rented for the salmon fishing) while on holiday with the Northcotes, that Harry did not "as far as I can see, do anything" but that he "moons about like a poor relation".[30]

Comments such as these often accompanied references to Harry (and Alice) in correspondence between Lord and Lady Wolseley. Because there is no comparable primary source for this period these views inevitably colour perception of both Northcotes. The Wolseleys were friends of the Northcotes and of the Mount Stephens, but had a greater allegiance to the latter. Observations in his letters indicate that Lord Wolseley's judgement may have been affected by a partiality to Mount Stephen, demonstrated when he said that "I never knew people so absolutely unchanged by

[30] Wolseley to his wife, 19 May, 1891, WP, 20/75.

richness".[31] This led him to exaggerate Harry's lack of the qualities of buoyancy and resilient energy he so much admired in Mount Stephen.
In another comment from Faskally in 1891, Wolseley said:

> "little Harry … does not fish … he has however grown fat. I wonder if he has any enjoyment in life, and if he has what is it? Alice is looking old and very plain. Lady St. as nice and genial as ever. Stephens just the same good old fellow he always was with plenty of fun in him".[32]

Wolseley also observed that Harry hardly ever spoke in the Commons, and commented that

> "Harry can speak very well and … has plenty of natural ability … but … if he won't speak he cannot hope to be employed … I think George Stephen is at times disappointed with him, that he does nothing in Parliament … His tummy is assuming that rounded form which the sleek well fed and nothing to do but prosperous citizen affects in due course".[33]

Wolseley's remark on Harry's relative speechlessness in the House of Commons was, at the time of writing, justified. Early in his career Harry made fairly frequent mentions of constituency affairs, particularly about the Exeter Post Office (in 1880, 1882, and 1883), but by the nineties he was not often raising the affairs of his constituency, with an exception during the year 1894 when he made four speeches on the Newton Abbot Workhouse. As previously mentioned, in the mid eighties Harry spoke frequently on matters relating to his current post, but this reduced dramatically after his father's death, and in 1890 and 1891 Harry only spoke four times in each year.

But despite this diminution of parliamentary enthusiasm it was unfair to see Harry as having had "nothing to do". Harry was apparently a reasonably diligent and conscientious Member of Parliament for Exeter, visiting his constituency frequently, and representing it on appropriate occasions, as in June 1888 when he was reported as having distributed the prizes at an orphanage in London that had taken orphans from Exeter. Both Northcotes were present at Exeter St. David's station in November 1889 to welcome the visit to Exeter of the First Lord of the Treasury. Further entertaining of the great and good in Exeter occurred when the Northcotes hosted the Duke and Duchess of York in July 1899. Apparently

[31] Wolseley to his wife, 24 May, 1891, WP, 3/203.
[32] Wolseley to his wife, 19 May, 1891, WP, 20/75.
[33] Wolsely to his wife, 24 May, 1891. WP, 3/203.

these attentions were appreciated by the burghers of Exeter. In January 1900, just before leaving for Bombay, Harry was the recipient of the honour of freedom of the city, in recognition and appreciation of his conspicuous services as Member for Exeter. Alice was not forgotten, and the wording of the comment on their joint contribution indicated perhaps the dawning of Alice's interest in good works. The newspaper report continued: "and (in recognition of) the devotion of himself and Lady Northcote to the interest of all classes in the constituency and especially of those in affliction and distress".[34]

Immersion in political life could be intense for conscientious members when the House was sitting, and Harry sat on committees: the Committee of the London Water (Transfer) Bills for example. He had made great effort to be elected, as his father commented in a letter to Cecilia on the subject of the General Election of 1885: "Harry certainly worked harder than most candidates think of doing".[35] Stafford wrote in another letter that counteracts any impression of Harry as dilatory in fulfilling his commitments, saying: "I hear you are working tremendously. Don't knock yourself up".[36] Harry engaged in electioneering for his party as well as for his own seat; he was reported for example as having attended an election meeting in Pontefract in February 1893.

Harry's journalistic writings alone would have taken considerable time and effort. Harry was paid for his articles, as he mentions in his correspondence with William Blackwood from time to time: "many thanks for your cheque. I fear I have given you short measure of its liberality" he wrote in May 1880.[37] But presumably he was motivated by enthusiasm for the political subjects on which he wrote – and this motivation does not speak of the idle man portrayed by Wolseley – as well as by the financial reward in the writing of them.

The Northcotes were not pressed for money, despite their substantial outgoings (although less than those of couples who supported London and country houses). As Harry told Selborne in 1902, the London house cost £2000 a year even when they were not in residence, and other standing charges, such as an allowance to Harry's mother, apparently amounted to £1000 a year or more. Alice received a substantial income from her adoptive father, although she did not receive the final magnificent settlement until the end of the century; and the Northcotes were recipients of several other sources of income, primarily Harry's family money. Harry

[34] *The Times*, 17 January, 1900,7.
[35] Stafford to Cecilia, 29 November, 1885, NP (Ex), 81, 13–14.
[36] Stafford to Harry, 1885, no month, IP, 50032.
[37] Harry to Blackwood, 29 May, 1880, WB, 4410.