

# UP THE COUNTRY



*Letters from India*  
EMILY EDEN

was an exceptional opportunity for the family Eden to live in India as the Governor-General's sister, and that opportunity was finely used. Its historical background of the late 1830s gives the book's unflagging light-heartedness an ironical force to which no parallel comes readily to mind, and it underlines the events which drew out this lively commentary during the regime of Lord Auckland. This charming and immensely readable book of letters possesses a marked historical value, and because of the underlying 'irony' given it by other events which the author could not then foresee, Edward Thompson has annotated the political and military transactions he introduces, making this outstanding work one fully comprehensible and relevant to the modern reader. The four contemporary illustrations satisfactorily embellish the book.

*Edward Thompson, late Fellow of Oriel College, Oxford, and former Leverhulme Research Fellow in Indian History, is known for his many writings on India, both historical and descriptive.*

UP THE COUNTRY



*The Hon. Emily Eden*  
*from a drawing by George Richmond, R.A.*

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# UP THE COUNTRY

*Letters written to her Sister  
from*

*THE UPPER PROVINCES OF  
INDIA*

BY

EMILY EDEN

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WITH AN INTRODUCTION AND NOTES

BY

EDWARD THOMPSON

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## CONTENTS.

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION . . . . .	ix
UP THE COUNTRY . . . . .	1
NOTES . . . . .	397

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

THE HON. EMILY EDEN . . . . .	<i>Frontispiece</i>
GEORGE EDEN, EARL OF AUCKLAND . . . . .	<i>facing p. 16</i>
PRIVATE NATIVE DURBAR . . . . .	„ 130
MAHARAJA RANJIT SINGH . . . . .	„ 198



## INTRODUCTION.

EMILY, seventh daughter (out of fourteen children) of William Eden, first Baron Auckland, was born at Westminster, 3rd March, 1797. In 1818 her mother died; she and Fanny set up house with their eldest brother George, whom they accompanied to India when he became Governor-General in 1835, staying until he was recalled in 1842. Lord Auckland and Fanny both died in 1849; Emily lived for another twenty years, first at Eden Lodge, Kensington Gore, then at Richmond, Surrey, where she died, 5th August, 1869. Health did not permit her to preside over dinner parties and evening gatherings, but she served the Whigs, her party, by holding morning reunions. She published *Portraits of the People and Princes of India* (1844), and *Up the Country* (1866, reprinted 1867 and 1872); also, two novels, *The Semi-detached House* (1859) and *The Semi-attached Couple* (1860). *Letters from India* (2 volumes), edited by her niece, Eleanor Eden, and published in 1872, included letters by her sister, Fanny; another volume of Miss Eden's letters was edited by her grand-niece, Miss Dickinson, and published in 1919. *The Semi-attached Couple* and *The Semi-detached House* were reprinted in 1927 and 1928, and greatly praised—in my opinion over-praised.

But *Up the Country*, which has all the merits of her novels—wit, vivacity, skill in phrase and description, and an eye for personal foibles—and does not suffer because it needs something more and is without it, seems to me a

book hard to over-praise. It was an exceptional opportunity, to live in India as the Governor-General's sister, in affectionate intimacy; the opportunity was finely used. I have let her writing have its own sufficient effect, with no more notes than seemed necessary. But its historical background gives the book's unflagging light-heartedness an ironical force to which I can think of no parallel. It is worth noting what the events were which drew out this lively commentary, and the events to which they led in the time of Lord Auckland's successor.

In October, 1837, the Governor-General left Calcutta and his Council, to tour the Upper Provinces. He travelled by water to Benares, in a 'flat' or long barge towed by a steamer. From Benares he marched to Simla. Thence, on 6th November, 1838, he set out for Lahore to meet Ranjit Singh on high political business, returning to Simla in the middle of March, 1839. He left Simla again at the end of October, reaching Benares 17th February, 1840, and going on by water to Barrackpur, near Calcutta, which he reached on 13th March, after two and a half years absence. The time will bring home to the reader the slowness and difficulty of travelling, a hundred years ago, even for a Governor-General; but the distance traversed was immense, and Lord Auckland was enabled to discharge duties at leisure and to mix freely with English society scattered over whole provinces. His sister glowingly reports that he came away in 'a great state of popularity in the Upper Provinces; all these people talked of him with such regard and admiration.'

In her letters we see 'G.,' like his sister, mildly amused by the Indian scene; a very good-tempered, punning, gracious gentleman. Miss Eden is discreet, and lets nothing of the political import of their journey escape her. But for us her

record is sown with reminders of matters more exciting than durbars and dances, rajas and their inquisitive wives, and middle-class English officials, as viewed by a great Whig noble and his witty sister.

They reached Cawnpur on 21st December, 1837, and found themselves in the midst of famine. It should be remembered to Lord Auckland's credit that he not only gave generously from his private purse, but set on foot a searching and valuable inquiry into preventive measures. Some officials would have had the Governor-General return to Calcutta, lest his army of followers add to distress already appalling. Miss Eden—who may be assumed to express her brother's opinion—considered that their presence was a blessing rather than a difficulty, since it was good for trade. She never came to suspect the extent to which dependants of an Indian official pillage a country through which they pass. And there was 'a magnificent breakfast' on Christmas Day, when 'G. sugared and creamed the Nawab's tea, and the Nawab gave him some pilau.' The Nawab was an 'attentive creature,' as he well might be. Less than six months previously he had been put into his position by British guns, and was now restive under a treaty forced upon him. This treaty was disallowed by the Court of Directors a few months later, in April, 1839; but the Nawab—more correctly, the King, for Lord Hastings had given the Nawabs of Oudh this title in 1819—could not foresee this, and indeed never learnt it. For Lord Auckland, whose administration has been more generally condemned than that of any other Governor-General, added to incompetence and carelessness a graver fault; he could suppress facts displeasing to himself, and he could garble documents. The rulers of Oudh remained fretful under supposition of a treaty that had been abrogated, and it was the annexation

of Oudh that crowned these discontents finally and was a main cause of the Mutiny. But in Miss Eden's time the King was merely fawning on the Governor-General and trying to win his good graces.

However, the attentive creature's affairs, though important to himself, did not trouble the Governor-General, who was obsessed, like most politicians of his time, with the Russian advance towards Afghanistan. A lesser menace was the great Sikh kingdom whose creator, Ranjit Singh, was now obviously a dying man. The superb chieftains who shared with him the hospitality exchanged by the Governor-General and their ruler were waiting for his decease, and in the course of the next ten years were to perish by poison, open assassination, and battle; their wives, who were so curious about the Governor-General's sisters and were so merry when visited, were to mount the funeral pyres of their lords. Meanwhile, the Sikhs became our allies. They were this already, by a treaty of perpetual friendship made in Lord William Bentinck's time; but the Tripartite Treaty signed at Lahore on 26th June, 1838, bound in alliance the Sikhs, the British, and the dethroned Amir of Afghanistan, Shah Shuja. This laid on the British no obligation to go to war, and the actually ruling Amir of Afghanistan was a man anxious for our friendship. But the upshot was two wars more unjustifiable and aggressive than any others the Indian Government has fought, one of them a disastrous one. Because of anxieties as to events on the far distant Russian and Persian frontiers of Afghanistan we proposed to force on Afghanistan a man driven out by his own people as far back as 1809 and twice unsuccessful since in attempts to recover his throne. Because of an infatuate pride the scheme was persisted in, after the state of affairs on the farther frontiers of Afghanistan had changed so com-

pletely that the plan formed was superfluous. Because of supposed military necessity, a solemn treaty with the Sind Amirs was broken, our armies sent through their country, the Amirs pillaged to support imperial aggression, and Sind finally driven into war and annexed. In Afghanistan our envoys were murdered, our troops massacred, and our name dishonoured in every way; and the Sikhs, contemptuously assessing our military value from the folly and prodigality with which we squandered lives, in 1845 crossed the Satlej and attacked British India.

In Miss Eden's letters we read of the early triumphs of the invasion of Afghanistan; of the ladies who refused to dance till their husbands were back, and of the weakening of this taboo as tidings came in of Ghazni stormed; of the refutation, by success, of croakers who had predicted disaster; of the punishment of a Baluchi chieftain contumacious enough to resent aliens occupying his territory as lines of communication. Her brother was advanced to an earldom after Ghazni fell, and titles were bestowed freely on lesser folk who had assisted. But on 6th January, 1842, having first surrendered guns, muskets, and ordnance, 16,500 British and Indian troops set out for India; exactly a week later, Dr. Brydon, the only survivor, apart from a little over a hundred taken prisoners, reached Jalalabad. The whole episode of the war has been handled, by many writers, with adequate severity, for its injustice, folly, and detailed and miscellaneous incompetence. Lord Auckland on 31st January published a General Order admitting 'a partial reverse,' which furnished 'a new occasion for displaying the stability and vigour of the British power and the admirable spirit and valour of the British-Indian army'; he had already, in 1839, issued a Blue-Book whose dishonesty was not fully exposed for more than twenty years. 'G.,' who

saw so vividly the ironical absurdity of the life he was living, himself furnished a more poignant example of absurdity still; a gentleman less strenuously amused by others and less light-hearted in the midst of negotiations that were to lead to so many and so fierce wars might have been a figure of more respect to posterity.

Both for the book's historical value and because of the underlying 'irony' given it by events Miss Eden could not foresee, I have annotated the political and military transactions she introduces. But I have not forgotten that *Up the Country* is first and foremost a charming book of letters, and I have tried to be sparing of other commentary. Anglo-Indian words in the one-volume *Oxford Dictionary* have been taken to stand in no need of explanation. Personal references have presented more difficulty. Miss Eden not only suppressed names, but usually changed initials. The help of a lady (Lady Reid), who has generously passed on notes that she copied in 1912 from a first edition of *Up the Country* in the Kurnaul station library, has supplemented my own researches and given me many identifications. But I have not been able to track down all the numerous folk who make flitting and anonymous appearance in the book, nor does it seem to me necessary to do this, even if it were possible. I have annotated those whose rank or position or subsequent career make them important.

For historical references and Indian words I have used, in addition to the recognised authorities on the Afghan War and Lord Auckland's administration, the *D.N.B.*, Buckland's *Dictionary of Indian Biography*, and *Hobson-Jobson*. Thanks are due to the India Office, and especially to Mr. W. Ottewill, for the trouble they took to identify a reference for me; and, as I have said, the most valuable information came from Lady Reid.

TO THE  
LORD WILLIAM GODOLPHIN OSBORNE.

---

MY DEAR WILLIAM,

I know no one but yourself who can now take any lively interest in these Letters.

She to whom they were addressed, they of whom they were written, have all passed away, and you and I are now almost the only survivors of the large party that in 1838 left Government House for the Upper Provinces.

Many passages of this Diary, written solely for the amusement of my own family, have of course been omitted ; but not a word has been added to descriptions which have little merit, but that they are true and that they were written on the spot.

Now that India has fallen under the curse of railroads, and that life and property will soon become as insecure there as they are here, the splendour of a Governor-General's progress is at an end.

The Kootûb will probably become a Railway Station ; the Taj will, of course, under the sway of an Agra Company (Limited, except for destruction), be bought up for a monster

hotel ; and the Governor-General will dwindle down into a first-class passenger with a carpet-bag. These details, therefore, of a journey that was picturesque in its motley processions, in its splendid crowds, and in its ' barbaric gold and pearl,' may be thought amusing. So many changes have since taken place in Indian modes of travelling, that these contrasts of public grandeur and private discomfort will probably be seen no more, on a scale of such magnitude.

Believe me,

Ever your affectionate Aunt,

EMILY EDEN.

EDEN LODGE, KENSINGTON GORE :

*May, 1866.*