

Sir Stuart M. Fraser

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By Carl Whiteley



Sir Stuart M. Fraser

EARLIER this month Sir Stuart M. Fraser, K.C.S.I., C.I.E. of Brook House Mudeford, celebrated his 94th birthday.

Each day, weather permitting, he strolls in his garden and considers himself very fortunate in the good health which enables him to still live a fairly active life. He retired to Mudeford in 1920 after 35 years in the Indian Civil Service. At various times he was tutor and governor to the Maharajahs of Kolhapur and Mysore, Foreign Secretary to the Government of India.

Remarkable is the fact that Sir Stuart's late son, Lt.-Col. Sir Denholm De M. S. Fraser, K.C.V.O., C.S.I., C.I.E., followed his father in the Political department of the Government of India.

One feature, unquestionably unique, is that both, in their time, held the same two important offices—that of Resident in Kashmir and Resident in Mysore.

While the father entered the political department from the Indian Civil Service, the son made his way in via the Indian Army. The former spent his first five years in a district learning his job in the hard way as a civilian, while the latter enjoyed a similar period as an officer in the Indian Cavalry in the halcyon days before the 1914-18 war.

JOINT SERVICE.

The joint period of service in India covered by the two was exactly 60 years from 1884 to 1944, in fact a little more than the last six decades of British Rule in India, for the son continued after retirement in an appointment in the India Office till the Transfer of Power in 1947 with the Cabinet Mission.

The personal reminiscences of Sir Stuart and his son were put together in booklet form in 1954, and in 1956 Sir Stuart compiled another booklet, "Miscellaneous Memories," recalling a few incidents during his 35 years in India.

In 1889 Sir Stuart was selected by Sir William Lee-Warner, I.C.S., then Political Secretary to the Government of Bombay, to be tutor and guardian to the minor Maharaja of Kolhapur and the Kunwar Saheb of Bhavnagar.

He next served for a term as Judge and Sessions Judge until May, 1896, when Lord Curzon appointed him to be tutor and governor to H.H. Krishnaraja Wodiyar, the minor Maharaja of Mysore.

"Looking back," says Sir Stuart in one of his booklets, "it seems almost incredible that any one officer should have been fortunate enough to know intimately two Indian Princes, so different from one another in nearly all their characteristics, but so alike in inspiring a life-long friendship with the Englishman whose relationship to them was that of their tutor and governor."

SPECIAL DUTY.

Sir Stuart was next employed by Lord Curzon in the Foreign Office, first on special duty, then as Deputy Secretary and finally for a spell as Secretary to the Government of India. During this period, in addition to his own duties, he was on special duty in 1905 as H.M.'s Commissioner to negotiate with the Chinese Commissioner for the purpose of concluding an agreement for the confirmation of the Anglo-Tibetan Convention of 1904;

Then followed his five years as Resident in Mysore and Chief and Judicial Commissioner in Coorg.

HAPPY MEMORIES.

Sir Stuart cherishes happy memories of the camping tours of inspection he made in what he describes as "this delightful country," which included more than one adventure with wild elephants. When his term of office ended, a deputation of the leading Coorgs travelled over 100 miles in the monsoon to Bangalore to present him with a farewell address.

In thanking them there was no exaggeration when he said: "The pleasure which every Chief Commissioner feels in his connection with Coorg is due not more to the beauty and interest of your romantic country than to the spirit of mutual appreciation which has so long characterised relations between the people and their officers.

"Every Englishman likes the Coorg, and I think I may say that every Coorg regards the Englishman as his friend."

Following the five years at the Residency in Mysore, and after furlough, Sir Stuart spent the period from 1911 to 1914 as Resident in Kashmir. There he had to deal with a very different type of ruler and of State, which included the frontier Agency of Gilgit together with Hunza and Nagar.

From 1914 to 1920 Sir Stuart was Resident at Hyderabad during which his principal task was to help the young Nizam through the difficult years of the World War with credit to himself and the maximum usefulness to the British Government.

And as the principal Mohammedan Ruler in India, His Highness rendered services of exceptional value to the British Government when Turkey entered the war on the side of Germany, said Sir Stuart.

TIGER SHOOTING.

In his booklet, "Miscellaneous Memories," Sir Stuart recalls several interesting incidents, including tiger shooting tours, an encounter with a rogue elephant in which the elephant figured as the hunter and Sir Stuart the hunted, and an encounter with wild bees.

The encounter with the elephant occurred one day when he was on an official tour in Coorg with three of his European assistants, and they were returning mounted in single file up a steep jungle track on the Western Ghats.

ESCAPE FROM DEATH.

"The dramatic character of my escape from death made the story 'good copy,' and versions of it appeared not only in Indian and English papers, but as far afield as Canada. Thus when some months later I was passing through Quebec on my way to fish for salmon in Labrador, on going to the bank, the manager, when he looked at my card, said: 'I suppose you aren't the Mr. Fraser who was nearly caught by the elephant!'

Sir Stuart has many Indian trophies and a rare collection of Indian gods. At the end of his 35 years in that country he had accounted for a good number of tigers and latterly his pleasure in the sport was very greatly enhanced by being shared with his daughter Violet—"as cool and reliable a sportsman as any I know."

On an eight day trip in the Adilbad district of the Hyderabad State, Miss Fraser accounted for four of a bag of ten tigers killed by three guns.

Since retirement, Sir Stuart has led an active public life in this area. He served on the County Council for 20 years and was appointed an Alderman and was also a Justice of the Peace.

One of his great interests is the Hampshire Association for the Care of the Blind, of which he has been a member since its formation by the County Council in 1922, and has taken an active part in its successful development.

PRESIDENT.

Sir Stuart has taken his part in Christchurch and Highcliffe affairs. He has been president of the Christchurch Auxiliary of the British and Foreign Bible Society for a quarter of a century and still holds that office.

He was first president of the Christchurch Brotherhood while it existed.

Sir Stuart regards his career as one of exceptional good fortune in the health which he has enjoyed and the interest of the tasks which fell to his lot as "a humble participant in England's unique task of so governing India that we have now the proud satisfaction of seeing her a self-governing member of the British Commonwealth."