

GENERAL SIR ALEX TAYLOR
G.C.B., R.E.: HIS TIMES, HIS
FRIENDS, AND HIS WORK

BY HIS DAUGHTER

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CHAPTER XXIV

COOPERS HILL

ON arrival in England Sir Alex settled temporarily with his family in London, where he found many an old friend known under very different conditions—Lord Napier, Sir Robert Montgomery, Sir Henry Yule, Sir Richard Temple, and others—in whose friendship he found needed consolation; for though he put a brave face on it, he was, undeniably, very miserable. His life-work had been suddenly arrested while in full activity, and the shock had been great. His training had been Indian exclusively; it would be difficult, he knew, to find occupation in England which would be complementary to his work in the past. Had he worked through his time of office as Secretary to Government in the Public Works Department he would probably have become on retirement a Member of the Council of India in England; but this was now out of the question. He was not in sympathy with English public life; its democratic setting was exceedingly distasteful to him, and it is doubtful whether he could ever have submitted to its conditions. His heart was heavy, therefore; and, in proportion to its heaviness was the relief with which he entered on the last phase of his public service, the Presidency of the Royal Indian Engineering College, Coopers Hill, which was offered to him in 1880; a position for which he was peculiarly fitted both by his

personality, which was exceedingly attractive to young men, and by his long connection with Indian Public Works.

The early history of the College is interesting ; it had its roots in conditions obtaining in India at the time of its foundation and previously.

As the Western man—whose ideal of civilisation is based on the exploitation of the material resources of the country he inhabits—got a closer and closer grip of India, the demands on the Department dealing with Public Works naturally increased. Roads and canals on an imposing scale had been made and were still in process of construction ; but the mid-Victorian era had seen the inauguration and rapid expansion of swifter means of transport. Railways in India date from 1853. Their construction was at first largely entrusted to subsidised Companies. This arrangement proved costly and otherwise unsatisfactory, and in 1870 the Government of India adopted the policy of constructing and working all railways through the direct agency of the State—an immense accession to its duties.

It was evident, also, that the Irrigation works of the future would be on a constantly increasing scale. India contains large desert-areas, arid because waterless ; and also mighty rivers, which pour millions of cubic feet of water per second into the sea, water which, if applied to purposes of irrigation, would make the desert bloom like a garden. It was felt that this waste was a slur on the domestic economy of the country, and that the future of canal-making was endless. With the commercial development of the country and the growth of great trading centres came the necessity for rapid exchange of information. The burden of work laid on the Telegraph Department became very great. Famines had been scourges before which administrators trembled ; it was clear that

