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978-1-108-07167-3 - The Life of Sir Albert Hastings Markham

M. E. Markham and F. A. Markham

Excerpt

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Chapter I

1841–1856

EARLY YEARS

ALBERT HASTINGS, the fifth son of Lieutenant John Markham, was born at Bagnères de Bigorre, in the Pyrenees, on November 11th, 1841, two days after the birth of the late King Edward, to whom he was considered in later life to bear a remarkable likeness. His father John, who had been obliged to leave the Navy owing to ill-health contracted whilst serving in the *Doris*, in the West Indies, was the second son of William Markham of Becca, near Aberford in Yorkshire, and Elizabeth Bowles; and grandson of Dr William Markham, Archbishop of York. Ten years after his retirement he had married Marianne Wood, and their eldest son, John, was born at Leghorn, in 1835. On their return to England they settled for a short time in Yorkshire, where their second son, George Henry, was born in 1837. In the next year they went back to the Continent, and at Bagnères de Bigorre four more sons were born: Frederick, who was drowned when he was about three years old; Arthur Augustus, born in 1840; Albert Hastings; and William Jervis, who died in infancy.

While Albert was still a child the family moved to Guernsey, and “Ronceval,” a low white house, perched on a wooded hill with beautiful views over country and sea, was always the home to which he and his brothers looked back with affectionate remembrance.

The first break in the family circle was caused by the departure of John, the eldest son, for China, on his appointment, in 1852, by Lord Malmesbury, as student-interpreter in the Consular Service.

Three years later the youngest son was sent to England, at the age of thirteen, to prepare for the Navy. This decision does not appear to have been the result of any expressed

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desire on Albert's own part, but it was evidently thought fitting that one of the sons should follow their father's profession, and there were already naval traditions in the family. Lieutenant Markham's uncle, John Markham, second son of the Archbishop, had risen to the rank of Admiral, and had been at one time First Sea Lord of the Admiralty.

Albert appears to have acquiesced very willingly in the wishes of his parents, and the event proved that they were fully justified in their choice of a profession for him, for he threw himself whole-heartedly into it. He left Guernsey in the spring of 1855, and was confided to the care of the widow of his father's brother, the Rev. David Markham, Canon of Windsor. Mrs Markham, who was at this time living in London, at 4 Onslow Square, was a second mother to Albert. Her only surviving son, afterwards Sir Clements Markham, the well-known geographer and author, became a very close friend of Albert, in spite of his eleven years' seniority; indeed the two cousins grew to be like brothers and the tie between them was a lifelong one. Sixty years later there devolved upon the younger the task of undertaking his cousin's biography.

There were also three sisters. The eldest, married to Captain, afterwards Admiral, Quin, lived in the same Square. The other two, one older, the other younger than himself, were his playmates and confidants; and in later years, when the elder had married and gone to Australia, the Irish home of the younger, after her marriage with Colonel Henry Clements, was often the scene of happy reunions during his periods of leave.

Albert was now full of enthusiasm for a seafaring life. Not far from No. 4 lived Admiral Fitzroy, a well-known naval scientist, also Thackeray, the novelist, who used to pass the window every morning while the family were at breakfast. In these early days Albert made the acquaintance of Captain, afterwards Commodore, Goodenough, and the friendship was maintained until the tragic death of the latter in 1875.

The boy's education was at first entrusted to Mr Neville,

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an elderly man, curate of Holy Trinity, Brompton, for whom he had the greatest respect and affection; but in the summer of 1855 Albert was sent to a private tutor, the Rev. John Benthall, at Newport Pagnell, Bucks. This was his first experience of life among strangers, and the discipline was strict. Any lapse on the part of the scholar was treated with scant patience by the teacher, and Albert was at first a good deal discouraged. But it is evident that Mr Benthall really took a kindly interest in the boy; his reports of his conduct and progress were very satisfactory, and Albert in later years always spoke warmly of the months spent at Newport Pagnell, and especially of the admiration inspired in him by Mr Benthall's cricketer son.

But now it seemed as if the boy would be disappointed of entering the profession on which his heart was set. October had come, and he would be fourteen in November, at which age the Navy must be closed to him, and all the strenuous efforts of his family failed to obtain a nomination. This was a great blow, both to himself and his friends, who now began to turn their thoughts to an alternative course. His aunt, writing to him at this time says:

I need not tell you, my dear boy, how much I feel for your disappointment, as I know how great it will be, but you must try and feel that we do not direct any of the events of this life ourselves. God has not thought it good for you that you should succeed in what you wish, but you may rely upon His goodness . . . and you may be sure it will not eventually turn out to your disadvantage, though at present you cannot help feeling grieved, having for so many months turned your mind to this profession.

However, just at this time the unexpected experiment of admitting candidates over the age of fourteen was started by the Admiralty. This lasted for a short time only, but just enabled Albert to enter the Service. Three nominations were secured for him, the one accepted being that of his uncle, Mr W. R. Crompton Stansfield, and he was at once sent to Mr Eastman's Naval Academy at Portsmouth for special preparation for the examination for his cadetship. He evidently worked hard at his studies, for he passed

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out fourth on a list of thirty, to the gratification of all his friends, not least of his father, who wrote with paternal pride:

Everybody that hears of you pronounces you to have done most nobly in passing such a famous examination.

His first act on donning the uniform of a naval cadet was to have his daguerreotype taken as a present for his mother, a picture in which his likeness to his sailor father, always noticeable, is very marked. He was extremely proud of the sword worn in those days by naval cadets. In after years he used to tell the story of how he went in all the glory of his new uniform and sword to visit his great-aunt, the Countess of Mansfield, whose house stood on the site now occupied by the Langham Hotel. The unaccustomed sword tripped him up and the budding naval officer came down full length upon the floor!

On gaining his cadetship, he was given fourteen days' leave, which he spent with his family in France. "Ronceval" had been sold in the previous August, and his parents were now living at Dinan. His brother George was preparing to enter the Army, but considerations of expense decided him to sacrifice the profession he had hoped to follow, and, as the father's affairs were not in a very satisfactory state, Mr and Mrs Markham yielded to the persuasions of certain friends and in spite of protests from relatives made up their minds to emigrate. In July, 1856, they sailed for America, and from that date the house of his aunt, Mrs David Markham, became Albert's home.

His first experience of naval life was on board H.M.S. *Victory*, Nelson's old flagship, lying in Portsmouth Harbour, and flying the flag of the Commander-in-Chief, Admiral Sir George Seymour. Captain Gordon was then in command, and was succeeded in March by the Hon. James Drummond. Albert made many friendships, the greatest of these being with the big Master's assistant, Phillips, regarded by him during those early days as his "sea-daddy, the most kind, unselfish, generous, and best friend it is

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possible to conceive." His impression of those first days in the Navy was of interminable courts martial, carbine and musket drill, hours of school under the Naval Instructor, the excitement of going aloft, and the painful spectacle of flogging, not then abolished in the Navy. He loved keeping watch on the same boards which Nelson had many times paced, and his hammock was slung in the cockpit, near the spot where Nelson breathed his last.

The Russian war was just over, and on April 23rd, 1856, Queen Victoria reviewed the Fleet at Spithead, the ships having recently returned to England from the Baltic and Black Sea at the termination of the war. On May 4th the proclamation of peace with Russia was publicly read to the officers and ship's company on board the *Victory*.

On June 17th young Markham was appointed to H.M.S. *Tribune*, carrying 31 guns, just commissioned for the Pacific Station by Captain Edgell, C.B. On learning of his appointment, Phillips succeeded in getting transferred to the same ship, but their delight was soon changed to bitter disappointment. Before three weeks had elapsed, Albert, for some unknown reason, was sent round to Plymouth to join the *St Jean d'Acre*, a steam line-of-battle ship, a two-decker, carrying 101 guns, fitting out at Devonport to convey Lord Granville and his staff to Cronstadt, for the purpose of ratifying our treaty of peace with Russia. She was commanded by Captain George St Vincent King. This did not at all suit the young cadet; what he wanted was to join some ship fitting out for foreign service. He knew that the trip to the Baltic would be more or less of a yachting function; the ship would be crowded with diplomatic officers and their wives and other ladies, and would be paid off immediately on her return to England. Moreover, he was informed that the gun room mess was more than £1000 in debt, and at the end of the ship's commission he would be expected to contribute towards the liquidation of this debt, for which he was, legally, in no way responsible. The mess does not appear to have been particularly well managed—there were silver dish-covers to go

over the food, but, as the hungry boy remarked, "There was precious little under them!" On guest nights they were expected to wear expensive fancy waistcoats, which were certainly not uniform, and entailed an unnecessary outlay to a boy whose pay amounted to 11*d.* a day, out of which 3*d.* was deducted for payment to the Naval Instructor.

In this dilemma he wrote to his cousin, Clements Markham, who would, he knew, do all in his power for him, drawing his attention to the fact that there was a small brig named the *Camilla*, about to be commissioned for service on the China station, to which he would much like to be appointed. Clements Markham took up the matter very warmly, as he himself felt strongly that the appointment to the *St Jean d'Acre* would be of no value to his young cousin in his naval career, and he was so successful in his efforts that, less than a fortnight later, when the *Camilla* was put in commission at Devonport, Albert was transferred to her books as a naval cadet.

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Chapter II

1856–1858

FIRST FOREIGN SERVICE

THE *Camilla* was a brig of 450 tons, only 120 ft. in length, and her complement was 120 officers and men. She carried sixteen guns (24 prs.), eight on each broadside. She was, as was the custom in those days, a complete shell; she had no masts, no guns, and no tanks; all these had to be taken on board and fitted by the ship's company. She was lying alongside a dockyard jetty, officers and men being quartered on board an old hulk, the *Egeria*.

The *Camilla* was commanded by George Twiselton Colvile, a smart seaman, an excellent gunnery officer, but something of a martinet. In spite, however, of his severity, he had always a warm place in Markham's affections, for he shewed himself most kind and thoughtful for the lad's true welfare.

Young Markham appears to have had a very high opinion of his superiors and messmates on board the *Camilla*. He describes the First Lieutenant, Henry Hawkes, as "a kind, hard-working man, intent on carrying out his duties to the satisfaction of his superior, a more good and kind-hearted man it was impossible to find." The Second Lieutenant, C. M. Andrews, was "a good and loyal officer who knew his work and did it well." The Master, Tom B. Read, was "an excellent navigator, and a good and trustworthy seaman." The mate appears to have been a character. He was a somewhat discontented man, due perhaps to the fact that he had held the rank of mate for a period of eight years, and saw no immediate prospect of promotion. Whenever he came into conflict with the Captain, as he often did, he would go down into the midshipmen's berth and vow he would not remain another day in the Service, that he would smear treacle over his commission, and send it in to the Captain! The occupants of the Gun Room, or midshipmen's berth,

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as it was then called, were the mate, four midshipmen, the clerk, and the Master's assistant, Markham being the only naval cadet.

It took a month to fit out the ship, and to receive all the stores and provisions, and on August 21st, 1856, the preparations being complete, the *Camilla* was towed out by a tug to the Sound, where she took in her powder and was inspected by Captain Hewlett, of H.M.S. *Cambridge*, and on Monday the 25th the little ship weighed, made sail, and proceeded to work down Channel.

The sea was rather unkind to the keen young sailor. For the first few days after leaving Plymouth he was badly sea-sick, but was allowed by the First Lieutenant to spend the greater part of the day in his hammock. Nor were his spirits raised by the fact that a young seaman who had fallen from aloft was placed under his hammock for examination by the doctor and died a few minutes later. The voyage was a stormy one, and the ship was in the Bay of Biscay for a week. Markham's *mal de mer* passed off in a few days, though he always continued to suffer from it for some days after starting on a cruise.

The accommodation on board the *Camilla* was extremely limited; the midshipmen's berth was a small compartment of about 8 ft. square, and had, as we have seen, eight occupants. There was no room for chairs, and they had to sit on lockers built round the table for the stowage of stores and wine. The only other place to stow anything was a great box, called the "jolly boat," fitted under the table. They had no store-room below, but used to keep salt stock-fish in a box under the main-top. The occupants of the midshipmen's berth had a steward, a cook, and a second class boy to wait upon them.

On September 7th they passed Madeira and the Salvage Islands, the first land they had seen since leaving England, and at 2 a.m. the next morning they anchored at Tenerife, off the town of Santa Cruz, the passage having taken just a fortnight, which was considered a very long one. When daylight appeared Albert's relief and pleasure knew no

bounds. There lay the land, almost within a stone's throw of the ship, the quaint and picturesque buildings dotted around, the whole surmounted by the glorious Peak of Tenerife. It was an enchanting scene, but even more delightful after the boisterous voyage was the absolute quietness and stillness of the ship.

Here provisions were taken on board and also water. On a sailing-ship of that period no water for washing was issued to officers and men after leaving port. In harbour a small amount was allowed, provided a supply could be taken in before sailing.

Everything on shore was new to Markham. He was chosen to accompany the Captain on a visit to the Consul and later joined some of his messmates in hiring horses and riding inland. After a meal of peaches, pears, and beer at a hotel, the young men rode back to Santa Cruz. On this red letter day Markham appears to have made up for his enforced abstinence, due to *mal de mer*, by eating three dinners—one in the midshipmen's berth before he went on shore, one in the hotel at Santa Cruz, and one with the Captain at 6.30 on their return!

After a couple of days at Santa Cruz the *Camilla* started on her long voyage to the Cape of Good Hope. Five weeks after leaving Tenerife they crossed the line, and went through the customary ceremonies connected with the visit of Neptune. Young Markham was very kindly dealt with, being passed gently from one Triton to another; the "doctor" did not prescribe any noxious mixture for him, and the "barber" only used his smooth-bladed razor in the process of shaving.

When the wind was light the *Camilla* invariably hove-to, so as to allow the officers and men to bathe in a sail put out for the purpose, but a boat was always lowered and a good look out was kept for sharks. Constant drill was the order of the day, and they soon had their little ship not only efficient, but a smart man-of-war.

During this voyage they suffered much from scarcity of water, and were reduced to a pint per man per day for

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drinking purposes. Even the pea-soup which was served out twice a week had to be made with a large proportion of sea-water. The complement of the ship was 120 officers and men, and the provision of water stowed in the tanks on leaving port was only sufficient for that number. But, in addition to the crew, there were on board twenty supernumeraries for the China Station, and the voyage between Tenerife and the Cape of Good Hope took fifty-three days, though it was hardly expected to occupy more than six weeks. When they reached the Cape on October 31st they had only 200 gallons of water in their tanks, which would only have lasted another two, or at the most, three days. The officers of the night watches had strict orders to keep the ship under press of sail, and not to shorten on any account until the ship heeled over to 40 degrees!

Although on their arrival at Simon's Bay there was much to be done on board in the way of refitting and the provision of stores, the services of all were dispensed with as much as possible, and plenty of leave was granted. This was invariably spent by the officers in riding up to Cape Town, a distance of about twenty miles.

Young Markham had always to be on duty in the Dock-yard from 6 a.m. to 5.30 p.m., returning to the ship for a short break for dinner at noon. But after a little while he was given four days' leave to go up to Cape Town with the doctor and one of the midshipmen. They travelled by the mail coach, which impressed him as "more like an old baker's cart than anything else," the journey taking about four hours. On the road a little inn, known as Farmer Peck's, was passed, a board over which bore an amusing old inscription, one verse of which ran somewhat as follows:

To the Gentle Shepherd on Salisbury Plain.

Multum in parvo: pro bono publico—

Very good entertainment all of a row.

Lekker kost¹ as much as you please,

Very good beds without any fleas.

There were only two hotels in Cape Town at that time,

¹ "Excellent food."