

WILLIAM CROOKE

1848-1923

On the 25th December, 1923, died William Croke, after an operation at a nursing home at Cheltenham—a great scholar and searcher of long standing into Things Indian, to use a phrase which he himself employed as a title to one of his books. To my own knowledge he had been studying the Indian people and their ways for more than forty years at the time of his death. During all that time he was more or less continuously closely connected with myself, and his unexpected death came to me as a grievous personal loss.

He was the eldest son of Warren Croke, of Macroom, Co. Cork, a member of an English family long settled in Ireland. He was born in 1848, being 75 years old at his death, and had three brothers, one of whom, Col. Sir Warren Croke-Lawless, C.B. C.B.E., of the Royal Army Medical Corps and the Coldstream Guards, was Surgeon to Lord Minto while Viceroy of India, and then House-Governor of the Convalescent Home for Officers at Osborne, Isle of Wight.

William Croke was educated at Tipperary Grammar School, winning a scholarship at Trinity College, Dublin, and successfully competing for the Indian Civil Service in 1871. His official life was wholly spent in the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh, where as Magistrate and Collector he held charge of the districts, in succession, of Etah, Saharanpur, Gorakhpur, and Mirzapur. This last post suited him exactly, owing to his knowledge of and sympathy with the people. Here he could, even better than in the other districts he had administered, find means to search into the minds of a primitive population and into the civilization of the remoter parts of India; and here he could win the personal regard of the people, as besides being a great scholar, he was also a great sportsman and had shot many a tiger.

Nevertheless, despite his intimate knowledge of India and its inhabitants, his was an uneventful career officially, though it was a strenuous one, and he could not win the promotion to which his unusual acquirements entitled him. He was too outspoken a critic of the Secretariats—the ruling power in India in his day—and he

was consequently not only unconsidered but was allowed to retire after 25 years of service just a district officer.

But official disapproval cannot affect a man's capabilities for putting the result of his researches on paper, and here Crooke was beyond the reach of his superiors in office. So both during his Government service in India and after it, he was an invaluable and prolific writer on all subjects connected with the people of India, and became a master-teacher of their habits and customs, their religion and ethics, and their ways. He was always willing to help research in these directions in any way open to him, and he loved it for its own sake. But in this side of his life—its unofficial side—he was never in any way pushing and reaped but little renown or recognition, and what of these came his way came late in life, well deserved. He became an Hon. D.Sc. of Oxford in 1919 and an Hon. Litt.D. of Dublin in 1920. In 1919 also he was awarded the C.I.E. by the Indian Government, and in 1923 he became a Fellow of this Academy. In 1910 he was President of the Anthropological Section (H) of the British Association, and in 1911-12 of the Folk-lore Society. He was also for years an active and valued member of the Royal Anthropological Institute. To the Folk-lore Society he was invaluable, becoming the indefatigable Editor of *Folk-lore* from 1915 to his sudden death, which greatly affected that journal for the time being.

Crooke's earliest contributions were to my own journal, the *Indian Antiquary*, in 1882 (vol. xi), and at one time it was proposed that he should assist me in editing it. From time to time he contributed articles: a long series of *Folk-tales of Northern India* running through five volumes (xxi-xxv), returning to the subject in vol. xxix. He wrote also on the *Indian Gipsies* in vol. xvii, and contributed a series of *Songs from Northern India* in vols. xxxix and xl, with a version of the great *Gūgā Legend* in vol. xxiv. In addition, he contributed very many notes and valuable miscellanea, including an informing review of Campbell's *Santal Folk-tales* in vol. xxi. The complete list of his contributions is to be found in Miss L. M. Anstey's *Index* to the first fifty volumes of the *Indian Antiquary*.

He was also, while in India, a welcome contributor from 1883 to the journal I started when in the Panjab, the *Panjab Notes and Queries*, and succeeded me as Editor in 1890, when it was converted into *Indian Notes and Queries*. This last he continued until he left India for good in 1896. Always a hard worker of indomitable pluck, he was ready to help periodical and similar publications from his almost unrivalled stores of knowledge of Indian Ethnology,

Anthropology, and Folk-lore, and wrote, besides many articles in *Nature*, for the *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* for Dr. Hastings.

As soon as Crooke settled down in England he wrote a book on *Homeric Folk-lore*, but found no publisher. Wholly undaunted, he produced out of part of his researches thereon, in *Folk-lore, The Wooing of Penelope* in 1898 and *Some Notes on Homeric Folk-Lore* in 1908. While still in India he compiled a *Rural and Agricultural Glossary* and his *Tribes and Castes of the North-West Provinces* for the Government. He also brought out the first edition of his *Popular Religion and Folk-lore of Northern India*, the third edition of which was in MS. at the time of his death, and the well-known volume, *Things Indian*.

Later on he contributed *Northern India* to the *Native Races of the British Empire*, and became an indefatigable editor of old books, producing with great learning and wide reading valuable editions of Yule's *Anglo-Indian Glossary*, usually known as *Hobson-Jobson*, in 1903, Fryer's *New Account of East India and Persia* in three volumes for the Hakluyt Society in 1909 onwards, Mrs. Meer Hassan Ali's *Observations on the Mussulmans of India* in 1916, Tod's *Annals of Rajasthan* in 1920, Herklot's *Qānūn-i-Islām* (Islam in India) in 1922. In 1912 he prepared the memorial volume of Sir Herbert Risley's *The People of India*, writing the introduction and many useful notes. And at his death he left a new edition of Ball's translation of Tavernier's *Travels in India* with the Clarendon Press.

In his own special line of Folk-lore Crooke collaborated with Mr. H. D. Rouse in *The Talking Thrush*, and contributed an invaluable article on Folk-lore to Sir George Grierson's edition of Sir Aurel Stein's *Hatim's Tales* (of Kashmir). He had further been at work on Tawney's *Kathā Sarit Sāgara* (Ocean of Story), which Mr. Pender is now making his own. His Presidential addresses (1912-13) to the Folk-lore Society were beyond praise, and to Folk-lore his contributions on Indian subjects were of the highest importance: *The Legends of Krishna* in 1900, *The Holi* (Festival) in 1914, *The Divali* (Festival) in 1922. To the Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute he contributed *The Primitive Rites of Disposal of the Dead*, with special reference to India.

Crooke was a keen archaeologist and a member of the Cotswold Field Club and of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society. To the latter's *Proceedings* he contributed *The Rude Stone Monuments of India*. The Bihar and Orissa Research Society made him an honorary member, and he wrote for its *Journal*.

Lastly, like other men who labour to the day of death, Crooke has left behind him a quantity of partly undigested material of great worth, songs and tales of the Indian people and the like, now in the hands of myself, Mr. H. A. Rose, and my colleague in the editing of the *Indian Antiquary*, Mr. S. M. Edwardes, and we hope in due course to prepare it all for press.

In 1884 he married Alice, daughter of Lt.-Col. George Carr, of the Madras Native Infantry, who survives him, and had five sons, of whom two are living. His third son, Elliott H., as scholar of Brasenose College, Oxford, became a captain in the Gloucester Regiment during the War, and fell at La Boisselle in 1916. Soon after, his fourth son, Hugh N., lieutenant in the Royal Engineers, was killed in the same neighbourhood. His second son, Roland H., served in the Dardanelles, was a scholar of Emmanuel College, Cambridge, and passed into the Home Civil Service in 1912, and is now in the Ministry of Health. His fifth son, Richard, is still at Cheltenham College, and has, since his father's death, met with a most serious accident.

Such in brief is the career of an accomplished servant of the Crown in India, and though he was not able to bear fools or the pretentious gladly and was never in the public eye, he lived a busy life all his days, bent on forwarding a real knowledge of the people among whom he worked as an official, to their benefit and to that of the Government he served so well. His own country, as well as India, has every reason to be proud of him, and of his work and its influence. He was a sound scholar and in every way a learned man. He was also a loyal friend, and on many an occasion I have found him willing to let others share the knowledge he had laboriously acquired, and ever ready to co-operate in the solution of the conundrums constantly arising about the people of India and their ideas. His was indeed a useful life, creditable to himself and of great advantage to the nation. His work cannot but be a solace to his widow, to the sons he has left behind him, and to the friends and associates who feel the loss of him.

RICHARD C. TEMPLE.