

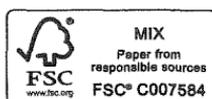
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C. BRAD FAUGHT  
**KITCHENER**  
HERO AND ANTI-HERO

**I.B. TAURIS**

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*To the memory of my grandfather, Gunner John George Faught,  
a Canadian soldier of World War I*

*An Irish and Continental Childhood  
and Youth, 1850–67*

**B**y 1850, Ireland was just over the worst of the cataclysmic potato famine which had brought about both depopulation and emigration on a massive scale over the preceding five years. However, the deaths of as many as one million people and the departure of about a million more meant that the country – having endured a decline in its population amounting to about 25 per cent of the total – would suffer for generations, and as a cause of both ongoing strife between England and Ireland and of political upheaval the potato famine was of singular impact. Issues of land tenure, rental, evictions, and dispossession had long stalked Ireland stretching all the way back to the time of Oliver Cromwell and even earlier. Indeed, conflict over land ownership and tenancy was chronic in Ireland and the years of the famine served to exacerbate all such pre-existing tensions.

In that year, and owing to the consequent attractive land market there to anyone possessed of a reasonable amount of capital, Colonel Henry Horatio Kitchener, aged 45 and at long last married, decided to leave active military service – most recently in the 29th Foot (the Worcestershire Regiment) stationed in India – and settle in Ireland. Of a piece with Ireland's cheap and plentiful land was its quick sale facilitated by the British Parliament's recently-passed Encumbered Estates Act.

Colonel Kitchener was a veteran officer, having first purchased a commission in 1829 in the 13th Dragoons. Little active soldiering

occurred for him, however, until the spring of 1842 when he sailed to India with the 29th Foot, his new regiment. After returning home to England later to marry, he then took his young wife, Anne Frances (Fanny) Chevallier, with him back to India in 1845, directly following their delayed nuptials. Stationed at the tiny garrison town of Kussowlie, a little south of what would later become the summer capital of British India at Simla (now known as Shimla), Kitchener, his wife, and their first-born child (in 1846) Henry Elliott Chevallier (called 'Chevally') lived a rather desultory – and for Fanny, an unhealthy – life in the Himalayan foothills. After a few years of increasing infirmity for his beleaguered wife Colonel Kitchener decided that staying on in India was impossible and the family therefore returned to England. A second child – Frances Emily, known as 'Millie' was born in 1848 – and after a brief spell in London a second move was then made across to Ireland, to a large property of some 2,000 acres in the west that bestrode the boundary between Counties Kerry and Limerick and was near to the town of Listowel. Called Ballygoghlan, the estate's owner was a bankrupt and happy to sell his down-at-heels property to Kitchener. Though in a 'wretched state', the prospects for the property's rehabilitation were good.<sup>1</sup> The £3,000 deal therefore closed in April 1850. A little over two months later on 24 June, the couple's third child and second son, Horatio Herbert – named in honour of Admiral Nelson as many English baby boys continued to be in those days, but always going by his second name – was born while Fanny stayed temporarily nearby at Gunsborough Villa, as renovations were already underway at Ballygoghlan.

The 1850s in Ireland proved to be good and prosperous years for the Kitchener family. Having sold his commission, Colonel Kitchener (as he would always be known) plunged into the life of a gentleman farmer, and met with ready success.<sup>2</sup> The size of the family grew with the arrival of more children (Arthur in 1852 and Walter in 1858), Ballygoghlan was improved and enlarged, and in 1857 a second estate, Crotta House, was purchased. Crotta, located nearby to the south and of a considerably grander architectural style than the humbler Ballygoghlan, dated from the seventeenth century. Accordingly, it became the main family residence thereafter and gave evidence of the sturdily gentrified nature of Colonel Kitchener's social status in local Anglo-Irish society. These two houses were at the centre of young Herbert's upbringing and that of his four siblings.

The mid-Victorian era provided the shaping contours of Herbert Kitchener's boyhood formation. His early years were ones in which the British abroad would receive their sternest military tests since the Napoleonic Wars: first, at Crimea from 1852 to 1855, and then in India during the Indian Rebellion (or Mutiny) from 1857 until 1859. At home, the Conservatives under a succession of leaders, the most impressive of whom would be Benjamin Disraeli, contested the political field with the newly-formed Liberals, who later would throw up their own titanic leader in the form of William Ewart Gladstone.<sup>3</sup> Kitchener came of age therefore in a world of outsized political leaders presiding over a period of robust imperial expansion when assumptions about national might and right were commonplace in Britain.<sup>4</sup> And for the child-Kitchener, measuring himself in a military manner began at home under the perspicacious eye of his father, the Colonel. All extant accounts of Colonel Kitchener emphasize his military bearing, his precision not to say punctiliousness, a thoroughgoing dedication to order, and an eccentric wont, suggested, for example, by his apparent use of newspapers rather than blankets in order to more closely regulate cold and warmth.<sup>5</sup>

In the manner of private education of the time, only then beginning to give way to the prestigious Victorian public school, and as a cost-saving measure, Herbert was educated at home by tutors; in his case Church of England clergymen and, for a time, by a cousin named Francis (Frank) Kitchener, a fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge on his way to a career as a schoolmaster. The young Kitchener's father insisted on home tuition even though such education was both rather perfunctory and sometimes spotty. However, its method of private delivery suited the son perfectly as it accorded with his generally reticent nature and with his own sense of local social superiority as a young Englishman living amongst the 'outcaste' Irish peasantry. As one of Kitchener's biographers put it, perhaps in hyperbolic but certainly in suggestively racist terms: he and his siblings were raised to 'regard themselves as the members of a master race in a strange land'.<sup>6</sup> In any event, his upbringing in Ireland – like that of Wellington in the late eighteenth century – was never deemed an impediment to career success even if it always remained somewhat declassé in the social circles within which later the adult-Kitchener would move. No one, it seems, no matter how exalted, could escape the reach of English class snobbery, whether it be a top military

leader like Kitchener or a victorious political chief such as Gladstone. 'Ah, Oxford on the surface, but Liverpool below', was the cutting remark made by an unnamed Whig grandee about the Eton- and Christ Church-educated but Liverpool-born future prime minister in 1860.<sup>7</sup>

In the late 1850s Kitchener's physical growth continued apace and as he approached his tenth birthday he was tall and slim with brownish blonde hair and sharp blue eyes, the left one of which contained a small but noticeable imperfection in the form of a cast, sometimes regarded as a sign of good luck. He was also about to experience the beginning of the end of this sylvan period of his childhood. The military nature of his father's exertion of familial discipline continued, and indeed was considered normal for the time: for some early infraction Kitchener once was staked out on the ground spread-eagle style and left to endure the elements in the manner stipulated by the British Army's Field Punishment No. 1.<sup>8</sup> But if the Colonel belonged to the school of discipline that a later generation would call tough love, Kitchener's mother, Fanny, was the fount of all contemporary maternal tenderness and devotion. In Herbert's relationship with his mother he was solicitous and venerative and as her health deteriorated markedly after the birth of her last child (Walter) in 1858, that tendency grew to be even stronger.

Fanny Kitchener epitomized well the elevated state in which respectable Victorian womanhood was held.<sup>9</sup> Her goodness and virtue went unquestioned; her love was believed to be unwavering; and her health was considered delicate. It is not too strong to say that this characterization was a trope in Victorian society and any criticism of it or worse, violation of it or of such women themselves, was considered to be amongst the most heinous of contemporary social and sexual transgressions. Hence, for example, the acute moral outrage felt in Britain over the savage treatment accorded the 220 British women (and children) who were initially imprisoned, and then the survivors of which who were violently butchered at Cawnpore by mutineers in 1857 during the Indian Rebellion.<sup>10</sup>

Fanny's obvious decline in health coincided with the hiring in 1858 of a young woman as nanny to the five children. Herbert was eight years old when the future Mrs Sharpe – 'Nanny Sharpe', no first or maiden name was ever recorded – arrived at Crotta House, and to her fell the close care of the children in light of their mother's increasing invalidism. Many years later, and following her former young charge's death after

having become the world-famous Earl Kitchener of Khartoum, Mrs Sharpe would leave an interview record of her memories of the years she spent as the Kitchener family's nanny. She remembered all of the children as being 'affectionate' and living a 'very simple country life'. Order and discipline were absolute under the Colonel, as 'I heard him once say to a servant, 8 o'clock is the breakfast hour and now it is nearly one minute past . . . So no wonder that in after years Lord Kitchener was such a rigid disciplinarian. It was bred in him'.<sup>11</sup> Nanny Sharpe's duties extended naturally to deepening the children's devotional exercises in Bible reading and prayer. 'Little Herbert was not a good reader,' she recalled some 60 years later, 'but he was quick to grasp a truth or an idea, and if he was once told a thing if it was worth remembering he never forgot it'. Increasingly, the children's prayers were centred on the compromised health of their ailing mother, but in Herbert's case at least they also included a suggestion of a growing career aspiration. Upon Nanny Sharpe's relating to the children the story of a devout soldier by the name of Hedley Vicars, who was 'a soldier of the Lord your Christ, as well as a soldier of the Queen . . . Herbert said I mean to be a soldier when I grow up and be like Hedley Vicars'.<sup>12</sup>

The passage of time and Kitchener's resultant fame may have rendered Nanny Sharpe's memories both fuzzy and purple in this regard, but they do nonetheless have the ring of truth about them. And certainly her comment that the young Herbert 'liked a little bit of quiet' is an observation that fits well the private, even repressed, nature of the man to come.<sup>13</sup>

By the early 1860s the Kitchener household was resigned to the sad permanency of Fanny's physical infirmity. She was suffering from tuberculosis, 'consumption' as it was called then, which attacked the young and middle-aged especially and thereby carried with it a particularly sharp pathos for its victims and their loved ones. In the years prior to the late nineteenth-century discovery of antibiotics – penicillin especially – there existed only the hope of 'breathing cures' for consumptives, which meant that those with sufficient means removed themselves to places where the air was thought to be clear and light and therefore restorative to lungs ravaged by the remorseless disease. All kinds of examples abound in Victorian Britain of those suffering from consumption seeking to find relief in some commodious location. Richard Hurrell Froude, for example, an early Tractarian

whose fiery denunciation of what he believed were the irredeemable erastian compromises of the Church of England made him the scourge of Anglican Broad Churchmen, took himself off to Barbados for just such a purpose in 1833. He returned to England in 1835, however, no better than when he had left, dying promptly the next year, forever mourned by his ardent friend and Oxford Movement co-religionist, John Henry Newman.<sup>14</sup>

As Fanny's consumption worsened in what was (wrongly) assumed to be the miasma of Irish air she had to breathe as a result of living near the River Shannon, the Colonel decided that to save his wife's life he must sell up and move the family to a more healthful climate. Switzerland was decided upon in this regard, its higher elevation and more frequent sunshine being considered just the thing for consumptives and a number of spa towns there catered exactly to what it was thought Fanny's condition required. Accordingly, the now much improved and markedly profitable Irish properties were sold at a profit and in the summer of 1863 when Herbert was just entering his teens the family packed up and headed across the Irish Sea to the Continent proceeding to Bex, a small Swiss town near the eastern end of Lake Geneva on the banks of the Rhone river. Famous for its salt deposits which had been mined since the sixteenth century, more latterly Bex had also become a destination for those like Fanny who sought relief from consumption through its elevation (1,400 feet) and its fresh mountain air. Bex was to be their home only briefly, however, before the family moved on to nearby Montreux, seen to be an even better place for those suffering from respiratory diseases. Similarly located on Lake Geneva at the foot of the Alps, Montreux with a population then of about 5,000, was just beginning to attract tourists as well as those seeking health cures, a number that would expand steadily as the century wore on. Today, known best as the home of a famed summer jazz festival, in the 1860s Montreux was a key Continental community for British expatriates and the Kitchener family settled well into life there. But, alas, it would not be for long. A year later, in the summer of 1864, Fanny died, not yet having reached 40 years of age. Though her death had been a long time in coming the family was devastated by it all the same, 14-year-old Herbert not the least among them. Fanny Kitchener's funeral and interment took place at the Anglican church in Montreux, Christ Church, Clarens, a beautiful small stone structure with a peaked roof and

spire. Entirely reminiscent of what the bereaved family would have known in Ireland, the church itself perhaps provided some minimal comfort at the nadir of their collective grief.

Losing his mother at such a formative age doubtless effected Kitchener's emotional development. Unsurprisingly for a boy of Kitchener's stern, militaristic upbringing, he did not write down what her passing meant to him. Referred to as the 'great sorrow of his life' by one of his biographers, modern psychology would suggest that such a loss might well have yielded a range of reactions in Kitchener, including emotional depression, as well as repression of a sexual nature.<sup>15</sup> His retiring bent probably was reinforced by her now permanent absence, and the mid-Victorian cultural imperative of apotheosizing women would likely have been confirmed for Kitchener by the sense of his mother having had sacrificed her health in the service of husband and children. At any rate, Fanny's death occasioned the break-up of the family unit. In light of the Colonel's close example, a military career for most or all of his sons was natural and expected. Chevally (Henry) duly was sent back to England where he soon enrolled as an officer cadet at the Royal Military College Sandhurst. As for Herbert, Arthur, and Walter, considerable primary and secondary schooling still awaited them in Switzerland at the Chateau du Grand Clos in Rennaz, a small establishment in a tiny village of fewer than 200 people located near Montreux. The school occupied a grand fifteenth-century house and was what a later age would call 'international' in scope, designed for the education of young (English) expatriates. Herbert would spend the next three years of his life at the school, a time that he neither wrote of nor talked about later as an adult. If adolescence for many is a time of adventure and joy, neither of these things seemed to mark Kitchener's life under the supervisory hand of the Reverend John Bennet, chaplain at Christ Church in Montreux and in loco parentis of the three younger Kitchener boys. Bennet's supervision was necessary for the last part of this period in the lives of Herbert and Walter because in January of 1867 the Colonel chose to re-marry and move to New Zealand in order to re-start family life in what promised to be a productive farm near Palmerston on the South Island. Over two years had passed since the death of Fanny, so the marriage and move cannot be seen as peremptory. Still, the Antipodes was a long distance to go and the family was to some extent sundered by the move, at least temporarily. The Colonel's new

wife, Emma Green, had been a music teacher to the teenaged Millie, and together the three of them along with Arthur (the only son not destined for a military career) sailed for Down Under that winter. Later in 1867 a daughter, named Kawaru, in honour of an eponymous river in their new home, was born, a step-sister for the five older Kitchener siblings.

All through this time of family upheaval Herbert and his brothers had not been experiencing a happy time of it at the Chateau. But they persevered, among other things becoming fluent in French and passable in German. The Victorian English were as class conscious abroad as they were at home – perhaps even moreso – and in a way that E. M. Forster might later have captured in one of his novels, the Kitchener boys with their Irish accent and unsophisticated manner were not of the school's usual type and therefore did not fit in very successfully with the mostly English student population. Still, Herbert was hardly the first boy who would survive a less than satisfactory school experience to go on to prosper greatly elsewhere: Winston Churchill and his apparent sufferings at Harrow come immediately to mind. But that would require a return to England. So as a 16-year-old early in 1867 Kitchener did exactly that, removing permanently to England for the first time in his young life.

## Notes

### 1 An Irish and Continental Childhood and Youth, 1850–67

1. Quoted in John Pollock, *Kitchener: Architect of Victory, Artisan of Peace* (New York, Carroll & Graf, 2001), p. 9.
2. Harold F. B. Wheeler, *The Story of Lord Kitchener* (London, George G. Harrap & Co., 1916), p. 14.
3. See, for example, Robert Blake, *Disraeli* (New York, St Martin's Press, 1967); and H.C.G. Matthew, *Gladstone 1809–1898* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1997). Also, Roland Quinault, Roger Swift and Ruth Clayton Windscheffel, eds, *William Gladstone: New Studies and Perspectives* (Farnham, Ashgate, 2012).
4. See John Darwin, *The Empire Project: The Rise and Fall of the British World System, 1830–1970* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009).
5. Horatio Herbert Kitchener, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.
6. Philip Magnus, *Kitchener: Portrait of an Imperialist* (London, John Murray, 1958), p. 4.
7. Quoted in Roy Jenkins, *Gladstone* (London, Macmillan, 1995), p. 3. First recorded by Walter Bagehot in 'Mr Gladstone', *National Review* (July 1860).
8. George H. Cassar, *Kitchener: Architect of Victory* (London, William Kimber, 1977), p. 19.
9. The sentiment is given one of its most famous expressions in Coventry Patmore's poem, 'The Angel in the House', published in 1854.
10. Christopher Hibbert, *The Great Mutiny: India 1857* (London, Penguin, 1980), pp. 188–97; Lawrence James, *Raj: The Making and Unmaking of British India* (London, Little, Brown, 1997), pp. 278–98.
11. KP, PRO 30/57/93.
12. *Ibid.*
13. *Ibid.*

14. C. Brad Faught, *The Oxford Movement: A Thematic History of the Tractarians and Their Times* (University Park, PA, Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), p. 87.
15. Pollock, *Kitchener*, p. 16. One of the cardinal works in shaping modern thinking on this subject remains that by Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, *On Death and Dying* (New York, Simon & Schuster, 1969).

## 2 The Making of a Surveyor-Soldier, 1868–82

1. Harold Begbie, *Kitchener: Organizer of Victory* (Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1915), p. 15.
2. Trevor Royle, *The Kitchener Enigma* (London, Michael Joseph, 1985), p. 19.
3. Sir George Arthur, *Life of Lord Kitchener*, vol. I (London, Macmillan, 1920), p. 6.
4. See, for example, A.N. Wilson, *The Victorians* (London, Hutchinson, 2002), pp. 278–9.
5. See John Pollock, *Kitchener: Architect of Victory, Artisan of Peace* (New York, Carroll & Graf, 2001), pp. 19–23.
6. See Fenton Bresler, *Napoleon III: A Life* (New York, Carroll & Graf, 1999).
7. Pollock, for example, thinks not, *Kitchener*, p. 24.
8. See David Wetzel, *A Duel of Nations: Germany, France, and the Diplomacy of the War of 1870–1871* (Madison, WI, University of Wisconsin Press, 2012).
9. Quoted in Reginald Viscount Esher, *The Tragedy of Lord Kitchener* (London, John Murray, 1921), p. 192. Other versions of the story, such as George Arthur's, have the content of the Duke's encomium reading this way: 'I am bound to say that in your place I should have done the same thing'. Arthur, *Life of Lord Kitchener*, vol. I, p. 11.
10. KP, PRO 57/30/91.
11. Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837* (New Haven, CT, Yale University Press, 1992). See, among many works on the subject, C. Brad Faught, *The Oxford Movement: A Thematic History of the Tractarians and Their Times* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003).
12. KP, PRO 57/30/91.
13. See Alan Lloyd, *The Drums of Kumasi: The Story of the Ashanti Wars* (London, Longmans, 1964).
14. Quoted in Pollock, *Kitchener*, p. 29.
15. See John Witheridge, *Excellent Dr Stanley: the Life of Dean Stanley of Westminster* (Norwich, Michael Russell, 2013).
16. Still in existence in London, in good order, and name unchanged, the PEF celebrated its 150th anniversary in 2015.
17. Quoted in Arthur, *Life of Lord Kitchener*, vol. I, p. 16.
18. Quoted in Pollock, *Kitchener*, p. 32.
19. Conder would continue in association with the PEF until 1882, at which time he would join Gen. Wolseley's intelligence staff in Egypt.
20. Quoted in Pollock, *Kitchener*, p. 33.