

Letters of a Victorian Naval Officer: Edmund Verney in British Columbia, 1862-65

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Among English country houses, Claydon House in Buckinghamshire has two special claims to fame: it contains eighteenth-century state rooms with magnificent rococo decoration, and it houses a great collection of Verney family papers, especially letters. The letters include some 30,000 from the seventeenth century, the most extensive English domestic correspondence in existence from that period, and for many years included 4,000 by Florence Nightingale, who was connected with the nineteenth-century Verneys and spent much of her time at Claydon. While these parts of the collection have long been famous, it has not been widely known that Claydon House also contains an interesting group of letters about British Columbia, written to his father by Lieutenant Edmund Hope Verney, when he served on this coast as commander of the gunboat H.M.S. *Grappler* between 1862 and 1865. An account of these letters is given here for the first time, with the permission of Sir Ralph Verney and the Claydon House Trust.¹

Lieutenant (later Sir) Edmund Verney (1838-1910) was the eldest son and heir of Sir Harry Verney, second baronet, who had been born a Calvert but had taken the name Verney on inheriting Claydon. He was conscious of bearing a name famous in English history: an earlier Sir Edmund Verney, Standard Bearer to Charles I, had died nobly defending the standard at the Battle of Edgehill in 1642. After a short period at Harrow, the nineteenth-century Edmund Verney entered the Royal Navy at the age of twelve years and ten months. Although only twenty-four when he arrived in British Columbia in 1862 to take command of the *Grappler*, he had already seen extensive service and had established a good reputation during the Crimean War and with a Naval Brigade in India at the time of the Mutiny.² He had maintained Verney tradition also as a frequent and

¹ My work has been facilitated by Mrs. Susan Ranson, archivist, and Mr. and Mrs. Michael Sandford, National Trust custodians, at Claydon House. Cataloguing of the manuscripts at Claydon is now in progress.

² See Sir Harry Verney, *The Verneys of Claydon* (London: Robert Maxwell, 1968), and Major General G. L. Verney, *The Devil's Wind: The Story of the Naval Bri-*

fluent writer of letters, and just before his arrival in British Columbia he had published a book, *The Shannon's Brigade in India*, based on letters and journals he had written during the Indian Mutiny.³

In the colonies of Vancouver Island and British Columbia, Edmund Verney served for three years as commander of the *Grappler*, and during much of this period he wrote to his father every few days.⁴ Since the steamers carrying mail via San Francisco and Panama left only about three times a month, the letters were often written like journals in several dated instalments.⁵ Like the earlier letters from India, they reveal Edmund as an excellent letter writer. He had very wide interests and wrote extensively not only about naval matters but also about a great many aspects of colonial life. He had a talent for detailed and lively description and narration. The letters, whether written at Esquimalt or Victoria, or aboard the *Grappler* at remote coastal points, or beside a campfire at Bute Inlet during the Chilcotin uprising, often convey a strong sense of immediacy. They are marked by intimacy and candour, which reflect his close and good relations with his father.⁶

The letters are shaped by the character of their recipient as well as that of their writer, and they embody many of the values and interests Edmund Verney shared with his father. In religion Sir Harry Verney was an evangelical Anglican and supporter of missionary activity; in politics he was a Liberal, Member of Parliament for Buckingham for almost fifty-two years. He was high-minded and altruistic, a supporter of the good causes associated with his friend and former school-fellow, Lord Shaftesbury; he devoted himself especially to working for Florence Nightingale, whose sister

gade at Lucknow from the Letters of Edmund Hope Verney and Other Papers concerning the Enterprise of the Ship's Company of HMS Shannon in the Campaign in India. 1857-58 (London: Hutchinson, 1956).

³ *The Shannon's Brigade in India: Being Some Account of Sir William Peel's Naval Brigade in the Indian Campaign of 1857-1858* (London: Saunders, Otley & Co., 1862). As its subtitle indicates, G. L. Verney's *The Devil's Wind* also makes extensive use of Edmund Verney's Indian letters.

⁴ In a letter of 7 August 1862, Verney warned his father that he should not refer to Vancouver Island as if it were part of British Columbia, but in the title and some other passages of the present article I have used "British Columbia" in its more inclusive modern sense.

⁵ On 15 and 24 March 1865 Verney complained that the mail steamers were being reduced from three to two or even one a month. Dates in the present article are usually those of the particular instalments cited or quoted, not necessarily the dates that appear at the head of the letters.

⁶ The letters are written in a very clear, legible hand, but they include a few short passages of shorthand, which I have not attempted to read. Verney's spelling is generally accurate, but I have left uncorrected the few little slips that occur in passages quoted in this article: *calcilaria* (for *calceolaria*), *beadstead*, *bombadier*, *batchelor*.

Frances Parthenope he had married as his second wife after Edmund's mother died. As well as having the strong local and agricultural interests of a large landowner, he was noted for his remarkable knowledge of geography and became an early member of the Royal Geographical Society. Edmund's letters indicate that even before his appointment to the *Grappler* his father had probably interested himself in such Vancouver Island matters as the foundation of the Anglican bishopric of Columbia and the "female emigration" scheme that resulted in the voyage of the "brideship" *Tynemouth*.⁷

Few of his own letters to his son on Vancouver Island have survived, but Sir Harry Verney carefully preserved Edmund's letters for 1862, 1864, and 1865.⁸ Those for 1863 have not come to light, and are probably no longer in existence.⁹ Thus the existing letters fall into two groups separated by a year's interval: those written from Edmund's arrival on the island in May 1862 to the end of that year, and those from January 1864 to his departure from the two western colonies in early June 1865. The 1862 letters are specially interesting as recording Edmund's first impressions and explorations, and it is best, perhaps, to consider them in a little detail before passing on to those of 1864-65.

Edmund Verney described his journey from England to Vancouver Island, which took almost two months, in several long letters to his father. Accompanied by a servant named Henry, who remained with him during his period in British Columbia, he embarked on 17 March 1862 on the Royal Mail Packet *Shannon* (which by coincidence bore the same name as the naval ship on which he had served in India) and occupied himself partly by reading "with great interest" three volumes of Vancouver Island papers, government blue books. He transferred at St. Thomas to R.M.S. *Tamar* and reached Colon by 5 April, continuing from Panama in the American steamship *Sonora* to San Francisco, where he spent some days in sightseeing. His first Vancouver Island letter is dated 15 May, a day or two after his arrival at Esquimalt.

⁷ See the article on Sir Harry Verney in the *Dictionary of National Biography* by Margaret, Lady Verney. Edmund Verney's mother, Eliza Hope, member of a notable naval family, is described as strongly Protestant and fundamentalist by her grandson, Sir Harry Verney, in *The Verneys of Claydon*, ch. 16.

⁸ Sir Harry Verney marked the date of receipt on the letters: for example, that of 28 June 1864 was received on 13 August. In April 1864 he experimented by sending his own letters via New York (presumably overland to San Francisco) rather than Panama.

⁹ The existing letters reveal that Verney wrote from Vancouver Island to other members of his family as well as his father, especially to his sister Emily, but those letters have not been found, apart from one to his stepmother Parthenope, Lady Verney, preserved with those to his father.

In this letter of 15 May Verney declares that his first impressions of Vancouver Island and his new command are very favourable: "You will want to know what I think of the place, and how I like my appointment: well at present everything promises to be very delightful." He writes that he made his first cruise from Esquimalt to Victoria and back that morning. He was a little nervous on entering Victoria harbour for the first time because of the many rocks in it but managed successfully thanks to the careful instruction of A. H. P. Helby, his predecessor as commander of the *Grappler*. He found the gunboat's cabin very small but arranged to rent a cottage at Esquimalt, facetiously named "The Palace,"¹⁰ from a worthy farmer "called Mackenzie" — that is, Kenneth McKenzie of Craigflower; and the bishop, Rev. George Hills, offered the use of a room in his house in Victoria, which Verney subsequently describes as the best house there.

Verney writes enthusiastically of the setting of Esquimalt: "I think the scenery here is beautiful: this exquisite little harbour is surrounded by little hills and bushes and pine trees growing down to the water's edge," though some considered the pines ugly; "they certainly give the land a ragged and quite unique character."¹¹ In contrast, however, his first impression of the native Indians in this area was that they were very unattractive both in appearance and customs. He describes the terrible ravages of smallpox from which they were currently suffering in the epidemic that was then at its height. His views of the Indians are a subject to which we shall return.

Verney arrived at Victoria in the midst of the Cariboo gold rush, and his early letters are full of comments on its impact. In the letter of 15 May he states that he has decided to postpone buying a horse "because horses are now nearly double the value they were three months ago, as so many are bought for Cariboo," and on 25 May he writes that he could sell the large knife his father had given him in India for almost any price. On 16 June he gives this picture of current conditions:

Shiploads of oranges, diggers, and cocoa-nuts arrive from New Zealand, and depart with timber and diggers from Cariboo: the Cariboo diggers are rushing down to Salmon river: the Stickeen diggers are tearing away to Cariboo, and the Salmon-river diggers are mad to get up to the Stickeen: numbers of the diggers are coming down the country and settling to work at Victoria, and

¹⁰ Verney explains that "The Palace" was so named in contrast to "The Cottage" occupied by Lieut. Horace Lascelles, commander of the *Forward*, sister ship of the *Grappler*.

¹¹ Verney follows the common English practice during this period of using "pine" as a generic term for conifers.

numbers of the Victoria workmen are going up the country to turn diggers: so we are all like the boiling water in a kettle, and no end of bubbles.

He expresses regret that he cannot accompany Bishop Hills, who left that morning on a journey to the gold diggings of the Cariboo.

On 22 August Verney used a panoramic photograph of Victoria as seen from Songhees Point to describe the city to his father, commenting on changes that had occurred in the almost two years since it was taken: the stockade of the fort, for example, is "now entirely pulled down."

To the right of the governor's house are the government buildings, built in a curious un-English, fantastical gingerbread style: they are flimsily built of brick and wood: the corner room upstairs, in the nearest angle of the large centre building is my office as secretary to the Lighthouse Board.

He considers a dissenting church, built entirely of wood, to be "a great ornament to the town," in contrast to "the hideous little wooden cathedral with its short stumpy spire," which occupies a fine site, however. He concludes:

the picture gives a very good general idea of the town, and the ragged look the fir trees have: but many of the latter have been cut down now, as the town has extended. The wharves are more numerous: to the right of the Hudson's Bay store, in lieu of the stockade has risen up a row of very respectable merchants offices and stores, and brick houses are every day replacing wooden ones.

What emerges most strongly in the letters of the spring and summer of 1862 is Edmund Verney's great enjoyment of the life he was leading, of the country, its scenery and climate, and of his new command. He writes on 3 August:

I am extremely happy and contented. I cannot remember when I have been so perfectly contented, except when I was tented in India: this extraordinary sort of happiness may be the result of climate, and this delicious summer; as I dare say in the winter I shall be cross and irritable enough. Day succeeds day, without a cloud; the sun shines, and the birds sing, and everything is as jolly as jolly can be: the scenery too is so beautiful, and the Indians are so ugly, and the breezes are so cool, and the sun is so hot, and the wild berries in the woods are so good, that I cannot help thinking I am a lucky dog.

In many of the letters Verney expresses a strong appreciation of the beautiful and picturesque aspects of the coastal scenery, forests, and flowers. On 25 May he writes:

I am much charmed with the great beauty of this country: the pines would be very ornamental if it were not for the fires which have at various times passed

through these forests: these have killed the trees, but left them standing in some places entire, in others but short stumps, and these dead trees and blackened stumps are often a great eye-sore: the living trees generally grow to a much greater size than we are accustomed to in England, for I think we usually consider the pine to be a light stemmed, brittle tree, but here they grow to a gigantic size, both of height and of circumference: when I am a little more at home here, I will send you the girths of some of the largest, and in Autumn I will look out to collect some cones. The forest is in most places pretty thick, but here and there it opens into park-like enclosures, and large masses of rock-crop-out, bare of all but moss, a little soft turf in the hollows, and the most exquisite wild flowers, among which one recognizes in great abundance the calcilaria, the violet, the sweet-briar, and the strawberry: indeed the forest is as full of wild strawberries as possible, and it abounds with other fruit-bearing shrubs: last summer the officers of the "Grappler" made enough preserves from the wild berries to last them all through the winter.

Two days later he adds:

Some of the walks in the neighbourhood of the Palace are very lovely: how I long for the "old folks at home" to be with me to enjoy them: in the middle of thick bush up crops a large rock covered with moss and lovely wild flowers of every hue, with the grey stones showing out in the prominent places; you can imagine how lovely this is, overshadowed by the magnificent pines, and through an opening in the forest one sees the harbour, the men of war, the light-house, and in the distance the lofty snow-capped mountains of the Washington Territory, and perhaps one or two ships sailing up the straits.

The same enthusiasm is expressed in a letter of 16 June:

I am delighted with the country, and am sure that it is the place of all others to send emigrants to: the woods are full of roses, sweetbriars and other flowers, and strawberries and other varieties of fruit: there are all sorts of scenery: quiet little woodland dells; open park-land, rugged cliffs, thick jungle and noble mountains, and with all a charming climate.

Verney's appreciation of the coastal scenery and climate was combined with a strong sense of pleasure in holding command of his own ship. He writes on 30 August from Cowichan, where a new settlement was being established:

I really cannot be too thankful for having got this appointment: it seems quite strange to me to rise in the morning and feel that I have not a care or anxiety: full leisure of mind and body to read, or to do a little nautical astronomy: so much to do that I can never reproach myself with being idle, so little to do that I am free to choose my own employment: I cannot remember a period of my life when I have been so perfectly contented: of course it will not be quite so jolly when I am sent to cruize about these intricate waters in fogs, sleet and snow, but at present I am lying in a land-locked harbour enjoying lovely

scenery and delicious weather: of all lucky dogs surely I am the luckiest: of course there are some little roughnesses, but they are not very rugged.

His enjoyment in his new command was increased, as he emphasizes in a letter of 1 June, by the excellent condition in which his predecessor, Helby, had left the *Grappler*, and the good discipline, training, and feeling Helby had established in its crew: "it is a great pleasure, and a great responsibility to command men among whom such good feeling prevails."

Verney's naval activities as commander of the *Grappler* are documented in the Claydon House archive not only by his letters to his father but also by two letter-books in which, like Helby before him, he kept copies of official letters on ship's business, addressed to superior officers and to such officials as the Navy's Accountant General.¹² These sources provide an interesting supplement to other naval records, since it has long been recognized that the *Grappler* and her sister ship, the *Forward*, played an important role in a British Columbia that historians have sometimes termed a "gunboat frontier."¹³ These two gunboats, built originally for service in the Baltic and Black seas during the Crimean War, had special utility even during periods when larger vessels were stationed at Esquimalt, because their small size and shallow draught allowed them to penetrate many places on the coast that were beyond the reach of larger ships.

The special value of Verney's letters to his father on naval matters is that they fill out the official records with personal detail, and convey a good sense of what life was like from day to day aboard the *Grappler*, from the viewpoint at least of its commanding officer. Much though Verney enjoyed his new command, he commented frequently on the special problems he faced, such as navigation on an intricate and still very imperfectly charted

¹² The first letter-book, which is mainly the work of Helby but includes letters by Verney at the end, extends from 8 October 1861 to 12 July 1862. The second, containing Verney's letters exclusively, extends from 17 July 1862 to 6 April 1865. The letters are concerned mainly with routine matters — finances, victualling, clothing, personnel: promotions, qualifications, discharges — but they shed light on such problems as desertions, and they sometimes contain information on special missions and activities, for example Helby's report on his investigation of troubles of an early Cowichan settler on 16 October 1861 and Verney's account of a northern cruise in the autumn of 1864. In addition to these letter-books, other relevant documents will probably be found at Claydon House when the cataloguing of the manuscripts there, which is now under way, is further advanced. The official log-books of the *Grappler* during Verney's period of command, turned in as naval regulations required, are to be found among the Admiralty records in the Public Record Office at Kew: Adm. 53/8157, 8158, 8159, etc.

¹³ See especially Barry M. Gough, *Gunboat Frontier: British Maritime Authority and Northwest Coast Indians, 1846-90* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1984), and see also his "The Records of the Royal Navy's Pacific Station," *Journal of Pacific History* 5 (1969): 146-53.

coast. He wrote from Cowichan on 14 September 1862: "Tomorrow at 5 A.M. I leave this place for Victoria. . . . I think that it requires somewhat of what Napoleon called 'two-o'clock-in-the-morning courage' to turn out and navigate a ship through intricate waters at 5 A.M. on a raw chilly morning." The *Grappler* did not always manage to avoid grounding or striking those rocks in Victoria harbour about which Helby had warned Verney, although on these occasions Verney assured his father that no blame was attached to himself. Another recurring problem was that of desertions of sailors and marines in a gold-rush colony, where the men could easily obtain several times the rate of naval pay. On 17 July 1862 Verney told his father of his regret that the government had refused double pay to the men of the gunboats; and the *Grappler* letter-book reveals that two days later he asked Admiral Maitland for permission to enlist foreigners, as there was no prospect of obtaining British subjects.¹⁴

Once when there seemed a threat of war between Britain and the United States, Verney asked his father, on 14 October 1862: "Does the defence of these colonies at all occupy the publick mind at home?" and raised the possibility that the little *Grappler* might be left alone to defend Vancouver Island and British Columbia against American ironclads, since two "Monitors" were rumoured to be under construction at San Francisco, while the *Forward* was out of service, having new boilers installed. His letters to his father, as well as the official letter-books, refer mainly, however, to such activities as helping establish the new settlements at Cowichan and Comox, investigating reports of troubles between settlers and Indians, which usually proved exaggerated, and pursuing smugglers and illegal whisky traders. The letters impress upon one the extent to which the *Grappler* was occupied in peaceful activities which in later times would be the work of such agencies as a coast guard: placing buoys in the mouth of the Fraser, taking supplies to lighthouses, pilotage in the Gulf of Georgia and elsewhere. In addition to listing such practical tasks, they sometimes reveal the *Grappler's* ceremonial functions: for example, on 9 November 1862, Verney wrote from Esquimalt that to celebrate the Prince of Wales' coming of

¹⁴ In a letter to Arthur Mills, 30 August 1862, which is preserved in a file of correspondence relating to H.M.S. *Grappler* in the Provincial Archives of B.C. (F1214), Verney states that there have been nine desertions from the ship since he announced in the middle of June that pay would not be doubled. The log of the *Grappler* for 28 July 1862 to 13 May 1863 in the Public Record Office (Adm. 53/8158) gives the ship's company as 40: 6 officers, 6 petty officers, 20 seamen, 3 boys, and 5 marines. (Armament is given at this time in the log as one 32-pounder and two 24-pounder howitzers, guns which under Verney's command seem scarcely to have been fired, except in gunnery exercises.)

age, "tomorrow morning I am going round to Victoria to dress ship, and generally to assist in creating a sensation."

Verney's letters provide an interesting record of what was probably the most enduring work in which the *Grappler* was involved during his first year of command, the establishment of the new agricultural settlements at Cowichan and Comox. He wrote from Cowichan on 30 August 1862 that most of the settlers who had recently been brought by the *Hecate* had returned to Victoria for implements and provisions; so he had been exploring the country, but the settlers and surveyors seemed to have already frightened away the game for which the area had been renowned. On 5 September he reported to his father again from Cowichan:

Things are promising very well here: some of the settlers seem men of good solid determination, and of the right sort to overcome obstacles and not easily to be daunted: I have hardly yet had time to make acquaintance with them all, but I have instructed them to communicate with me frequently, and to let me know how I can be of use to them. There is certainly more good land here than I expected to find, and that can be cleared with comparatively little trouble, and now some of the settlers have brought up their wives and children which looks as if they were in earnest.

A week later on 14 September Verney provided a further account, especially of one "curious" couple among the Cowichan settlers:

I still think that this settlement will prove a success, but I am sorry to say that one of the best of the settlers has given it up, and will return with me tomorrow morning. Some of the settlers are most curious characters: a man and his wife have taken, [*sic*] both well-educated people: they have rigged up a sort of wigwam of boughs and a tent under which they have established a four post bedstead: the gentleman shoots and looks over his property, the lady washes, cooks, and does needle-work: this is tolerable fun now, but in a week or two the rains will come and they will both be laid up, and perhaps lose their lives: I have today been urging them to set about building their log-house; to take advantage of the fine weather and not to fritter away their time: "oh", they say, "it won't take long when we once get to work". The gentleman's future, he says, is a brewery and a large farm: the lady's a good vegetable-garden and poultry yard: you may guess how stable their wigwam is when I tell you that a few nights ago, in a dead calm, the roof fell down on their noses in the four-post beadstead.

Verney's later letters confirm that he took a special interest in the progress of the Cowichan settlement. Although we do not have his letters to his father for 1863, in one of those for 1864 he enclosed a copy of an official letter to Commodore Spencer, in which he wrote on 10 May 1863 that he was gratified at the progress of this settlement and "the general contentment of the settlers." On 4 June 1864 he told his father: "I have just

returned from a week's visit to Cowichan which I enjoyed exceedingly, visiting among my friends the settlers, who were most hospitable, and welcomed me very pleasantly."¹⁵

In the Comox district the *Grappler* is still remembered as having brought the first group of European settlers there early in October 1862. In a letter of 11 October to his stepmother Parthenope, Lady Verney, Edmund describes this occasion; and in a letter to his father on 1 November he gives an account of another visit to Comox, when he was accompanied by Bishop Hills. These letters provide descriptions of the rich agricultural land, abundant game, great forests and fine scenery of the Comox Valley, and of the enthusiasm of the new settlers.¹⁶ In these and other letters Verney consistently reports to his father that Vancouver Island is a good colony for immigrants, especially if they resist the gold-rush fever. He writes on 14 October that, although he believes the days of making a rapid fortune in land speculation are past, he considers "there can be no colony better suited for a man, whatever his position in life, who intends to make it his home, and never to return to England or to go gold-digging."

Wide-ranging though his activities were as a naval officer, Verney quickly and energetically threw himself into many other activities as well. On 20 July 1862 he wrote that, while he was modifying some of his earlier "fanciful ideas" of service, he hoped to do useful work "under the patronage and with the advice of the dear bishop." On 22 September he declared: "I wish no committee to be complete without me, and I wish to be considered as one who has the interests of these colonies most warmly at heart." Four days later he added: "What with being a member of the Immigration Board, of the female Immigration Committee, a magistrate, Secretary to the Lighthouse Board, and last but not least, commander of a gunboat, I am always busy."¹⁷ His sitting as a magistrate evidently proved

¹⁵ Further evidence of Verney's friendship with the Cowichan settlers appears in Robert Brown's Journal, 8 June 1864. See *Robert Brown and the Vancouver Island Exploring Expedition*, ed. John Hayman (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1989), 42.

¹⁶ With the permission of Sir Ralph Verney, I was able to provide extracts from these Comox letters for D. E. Isenor, W. N. McInnis, E. G. Stephens, and D. E. Watson, *Land of Plenty: A History of the Comox District* (Campbell River: Ptarmigan Press, 1987), 61, 171. This remains the only previously published part of Edmund Verney's Vancouver Island correspondence.

¹⁷ On 5 August 1862 *The British Colonist* reported that Verney addressed an organizing meeting of the Immigration Board on a subject which also occurs in his letters: the character, absurdly unsuited to local conditions, of some English immigrants he has encountered. His letter-books as Secretary of the Lighthouse Board, which reveal characteristic energy and attention to detail, are preserved in the Provincial Archives of B.C. (C/AA/30.73 J 1, 2).

controversial. On 11 November 1862 he wrote that Captain Richards and others disapproved of his being a magistrate and identifying himself with the interests of the island colony, but he enclosed a clipping from *The British Colonist* in which he was defended on the grounds that commanders of naval vessels were *ex officio* magistrates.¹⁸ He was undeterred by the criticism, and describes himself on 10 January 1864 as a magistrate for both the colonies of Vancouver Island and British Columbia.

A matter in which Verney was involved both as naval officer and as member of the Female Immigration Committee was the arrival of the "bridship" *Tynemouth* in September 1862, which he writes about as a subject of special interest to his father. On 20 September he states that he and his men have prepared the Marine Barracks for the reception of the immigrants, and taken many of them and entertained them on the *Grappler* to a regatta. He reports that on the whole the scheme has been a success. Three or four women arrived intoxicated, but "you must not think this so very serious after all"; although a few of the women are "thoroughly bad," so there must have been some neglect in England. He concludes: "I think the little orphans from East Grinstead took my fancy most: perhaps that is because being only twelve they do not expect to get married at once."

Verney's activities brought him into contact with a wide variety of people on Vancouver Island, and his letters make it clear that his opinion of the people was much more mixed than his response to the scenery. His doubts about some of the prospective inhabitants of the island had begun during his voyage on the *Tamar* in the Caribbean. On 5 April 1862 he reported of the passengers bound for the colony: "nearly all are going out without any defined object: one has a promise of 'some appointment'; another a letter to the governor which is to work wonders: two have left the army, and one naturally thinks, 'I wonder why they left it'." Several months after his arrival he wrote to his father on 22 September: "You are right in thinking that this is a very curious place." He deplores the English practice of sending out those who are "rather wild," for unless they are already reformed they "go to the dogs at once" and become drunkards and reprobates. On Vancouver Island he made a wide variety of friends, ranging from the McKenzies of Craigflower to Edmund Coleman the artist and Cowichan settlers, and in his letters he is full of praise for certain individuals, such as Bishop Hills, whom he finds "a most lovable man" and considers needs only a wife to be a perfect bishop (25 May, 1 June). But

¹⁸ See *The British Colonist*, 3 and 6 December 1862, in which criticism of Verney published in the rival *Chronicle* is refuted.

he states on 11 October: "In this colony I find the country more interesting than the people, nature than art."

Verney belonged to a family known for its support of liberal causes, but the aristocratic Whig and naval traditions in which he had been brought up were far removed from the North American frontier ideas of democracy and equality he sometimes encountered on Vancouver Island. On 1 June 1862 he complains: "nobody seems to respect any-body else, but people aim at establishing a most odious fraternity: I hear a grocer address a lieutenant R.N. by his unadorned surname with every familiarity." An amusing illustration of this state of affairs is provided by an episode he describes on 15 November:

While waiting my turn at the post office, a half intoxicated miner came up, and stared me in the face . . . then very rudely elbowed himself in front of me: still I took no notice, and he began speaking to the by-standers: "I say, what a swell we are in our regimentals, ain't we?" Then finding I would take no notice of him he held up some tobacco in my face, and said "I say governor, have a chaw?"

Verney quickly developed a critical view of the official colonial establishment, including Governor Douglas. On 2 July 1862 he wrote in a letter marked "Private. Not to be copied":

Having been out here nearly two months, I may venture to give an opinion on matters in the Colonies[.] I think that the sooner the governor is relieved, the better; with every good intention, he is I think a great drag on the place: I am also very much inclined to think that there ought to be a separate governor for British Columbia. Considering his great disadvantages governor Douglas is a wonderful man, but he has no pretension to be a high-minded, superior gentleman; he is very pompous and ridiculous, and always cruizes about in uniform with a bombardier of Engineers lashed on to a cavalry sword following in his wake: this solemn procession of two may be seen parading Victoria every evening.

Verney describes a state dinner for the Queen's Birthday, which he had attended a few days after his arrival, as "a preposterously ridiculous farce." He reports that the governor is "much led by his niece and her husband Mr. Young: the latter is anything but popular"; and continues:

It is generally stated that all roads are led through the property of the governor or some of his relations, for each of whom he appears to have found a snug berth: I think that when he goes it will be a relief to the colony: what this place wants above all things is to have its morale, and its whole tone raised: this the bishop does but little towards because he is unmarried, and the governors influence for it is nil.

The criticism of Douglas' nepotism is expanded in a letter of 20 July, after Verney had attended a "pic nic" with members of the Douglas family: "The first thing that struck me was how entirely the governor has provided for his family." He concludes his account of the family:

thus you see, the colonies provide for the Governor, his three daughters and his niece: in addition to this the Attorney-General's wife is more distantly related to him: now, can you wonder that people complain that the colonies are governed by a family clique, who know that in these civilized day[s] their reign cannot last long, and are feathering their nests as fast as they can?

While criticism of Douglas' nepotism was common at the time, some of Verney's comments on the Douglas family are adversely affected by his own biases. The best he can find to say of the governor's wife is: "Mrs. Douglas is a good creature but utterly ignorant."

Verney is not without awareness of the greatness of James Douglas' character and achievements. His criticisms are nearly always accompanied by tributes, and he repeatedly describes the governor as a "wonderful man," as in this comment on 20 August 1862:

In praise of the Governor, personally, too much cannot be said: having been in the country forty years, having never seen a railroad, and having imbibed the not very liberal sentiments of the Hudson Bay Company, he is a wonderful man. . . .

He repeats also, however, his view that the time for Douglas is at an end, and that he is now

a great drag on the colony, and I can say this the more freely because he is always extremely friendly to me, and is really a very good kind hearted man: with the democratic American feeling here, and the general immoral influence of the Hudson's Bay Company, a refined English gentleman is sadly wanted at the head of affairs.¹⁹

Douglas should be removed, but with great kindness, Verney states on 20 July: "it would not be right to hurt his feelings for he has done so much for the colonies."

The governor's failure to give what Verney considered the proper social and moral leadership is illustrated by his behaviour during the July picnic:

¹⁹ The anti-American bias apparent in such comments may have been intensified by the fact that Verney's grandfather, General Sir Harry Calvert, had served in the War of the American Revolution under Cornwallis and was held as an American prisoner for about three years after the surrender at Yorktown. In a late publication, however, Verney suggests that Britain has much to learn from the United States in such fields as education and industrial methods. See his *American Methods* (London and Edinburgh: W. & R. Chambers, 1904).

for instance, yesterday afternoon he conversed chiefly with a man who is living in open adultery with an Australian woman, and who ought not to be admitted to decent society: this was all very well in the days of the Hudson's Bay company, when they encouraged their servants to cohabit with native women to keep up trade, but now it shocks refined people, and turns the balance the wrong way with those who are not very decided.

What is now needed, Verney continues in this letter of July 20, is a governor who will "raise the standard of excellence in religion, in morals, in dinners, servants, gardens, houses, dress, manners, and customs; the poor batchelor bishop fights hard for it, but does little alone." Moreover, a different type of governor is needed, he considers, to negotiate such high matters of policy and diplomacy as the acquisition of the Alaska panhandle from Russia: for, he states on 2 July, "it is rumoured that the Russians would not be unwilling to give up their three-hundred miles of sea-board," and this is now an urgent matter because of the Stikine gold rush.

Verney is as candid in his views of other colonial officials as of the governor. In the letter of 20 July he describes Douglas' son-in-law, the Speaker of the House of Assembly, "Dr. Helmkin," as "an infidel," and adds: "but the Governor and he have not spoken to each other for years." On 23 November he describes Douglas' brother-in-law, Chief Justice Cameron, as "an uncertified bankrupt (my authority is the Attorney General)." He says he might characterize Cameron as "an inane booby" but he likes him, for he is "a harmless old gentleman": "he generally wears a benign vacant smile on his countenance." On the other hand, Attorney General Cary is "a clever man, but vulgar, unpopular, and insincere." No doubt some of the comments, such as those on Helmcken, should be taken as records of the exaggerations of current gossip rather than as strictly literal truths. Verney not only marks the letter of 20 July as "Private. Not to be copied" but also describes it to his father as containing "a great deal of scandal, abuse &c."

Verney succinctly describes the government of Vancouver Island on 16 August 1862 as neither Yankee nor English but Hudson's Bay Company: mean, petty, and slovenly. He liked better the British Columbia official establishment and society he found in New Westminster. After his first visit there he reports on 2 July:

the very little I have seen of the people of British Columbia has impressed me more favourably than the sister colony: I am inclined to attribute this to Colonel Moody's influence: he is a great visionary, but perhaps this is not such a bad thing after all.

He confirms this judgement on July 20:

Colonel Moody is far from a perfect being, but he has done much towards raising the tone of British Columbia, which is much more English in feeling: New Westminster is but a small town of huts in a clearing of the forest, but I would far sooner live there than in Victoria, for there are more English feeling, more English sabbath-observance and less American democracy and equality: among that very small society reigns good-feeling, gentlemanly-kindness and courtesy, and one can look up to such men as colonel Moody and his officers of Engineers.

In contrast to the view that was to emerge in some circles a little later of New Westminster as a hot-bed of immigrant Canadian democracy, Verney writes on 7 August from Esquimalt:

New Westminster is thoroughly English, Victoria is half American: Colonel Moody and the Engineers have introduced an upper class as well defined as in England; here the Governor and his poor wife are nowhere.

In the later part of 1862, however, Verney reports rapid improvement in social conditions and other aspects of life in Victoria. On 11 October he writes to his stepmother that there is every prospect of great betterment in the state of society before long:

the bishop says there is a wonderful change since he has been here, and I can detect a change even during the few months that I have been here. Several of the new arrivals have brought *good wives*, a great point.

On 14 October he states:

Victoria has much advanced during the short time I have been here: four clubs are being established: 1. an Immigrants' Home: 2. a young men's society: 3. a commercial reading room: 4. a general club: a company is being talked of to make a railroad between Esquimalt and Victoria: the gas-company is just making a start with lighting the town; and various companies having a tendency to open up and civilize the country are starting into life: I believe that more progress has been made during the last three months than during any previous six months.

The 1862 letters conclude with a good detailed account of Verney's first Christmas on Vancouver Island. Aboard the *Grappler*, after the ordinary morning exercises the lower deck was decorated, and a turkey was presented to each mess. After divine service Verney visited Captain Spencer aboard H.M.S. *Topaz*, then returned to the *Grappler*, where he was chaired and carried to each mess, to taste a piece of duff from each, and to be cheered and told he was a jolly good fellow. He was pleased that not one man was the worse for liquor that day but that Christmas was merrily kept aboard the *Grappler*.

On this Christmas Day Verney then went to dinner with the McKenzies at Craigflower, where he found a large party. As well as dinner, there were toasts, songs, charades, dancing, and blind-man's bluff: "Blind man's bluff was *the* entertainment followed by all." The first yawn of the smallest child was seen at 12:25. He was in bed aboard the *Grappler* by 1:15, but the party showed no signs of breaking up when he left: for all he knows when he writes they may be dancing still. Christmas at Craigflower became a regular part of the pattern of his life during the remainder of his time on Vancouver Island; on 25 December 1864 he reports that he dined there "as usual."

The apparent loss of the letters for the year 1863 is the more to be regretted because this was an active period for the *Grappler*. The missing letters would no doubt have included Verney's account of the *Grappler*'s participation in May with other naval vessels in the search for the Lemalchi Indians believed responsible for murders in the Gulf Islands,²⁰ and his description of an extended northern cruise in October and November to Fort Rupert, Bella Coola, Port Simpson, Metlakatla, and Kitimat. The gap is partly filled by an unsigned account of the northern cruise, titled "Return of the *Grappler*," in *The British Colonist* of 4 December, and by extracts from Verney's official report on the cruise, which were sent by Commander Hardinge to Governor Douglas and are preserved in the Provincial Archives.²¹ They reveal that bad weather made this an adventurous cruise and that on 16 November the *Grappler* was for a time in danger of sinking when grounded on a reef in Milbanke Sound.

Verney's letters in 1864-65 range over as wide a variety of subjects as those in 1862: everything from Victoria's continued failure to observe proper Victorian standards to the surprising possibility that Burrard Inlet might someday rival Victoria as a seaport, and the manner in which the navy marked the death of Lincoln. On 6 March 1864, for example, he deplores the "desecration of the Sabbath that is brought about in a thousand different ways by the arrival and departure of the mail steamer on a Sunday" in Victoria, and describes the city as "a sad mammon-worshipping place." On 13 January 1865 he writes from Government House, New Westminster, that a road is being built from that town to Burrard Inlet, which will encourage ocean-going ships to come there rather than to Vic-

²⁰ See Barry M. Gough, *Gunboat Frontier*, 140-47.

²¹ In addition to this report (F1208/5), some other information about the northern cruise, including reports on medical work among Indians by Dr. David Walker, who was taken on this voyage, is to be found in the file of *Grappler* correspondence in the Provincial Archives (F1214).

toria. On 19 April 1865 he describes the response to the news that had quickly reached the colonies by the new telegraph line: "Yesterday we received news of the death of Lincoln, which has created a great sensation here as may be supposed. . . . The men of war in the harbour have their colours half-mast and the U.S. flag at the main half-mast."

A leading subject of the letters in the earlier part of 1864 is the preparation for the retirement of the recently knighted Sir James Douglas, including the farewell banquet in Victoria, and the reception of his successor as Governor of Vancouver Island, Arthur Kennedy. The letters reveal that before his departure from England Kennedy visited Claydon House and that when he arrived on the island in late March he brought gifts for Verney from his family. Verney was further honoured when Kennedy made his official entry to Victoria by coming around from Esquimalt aboard the *Grappler*.

On 26 March Verney reports that Kennedy received a very favourable reception, but on 6 April he expresses outrage that the House of Assembly has refused to provide the Governor with a residence and describes the remarks of the Speaker, Dr. Helmcken, as "gross, treasonable, and insolent."²² On 2 May he provides an account of a lunch he has given the new governor. During the remainder of his time on Vancouver Island his personal relations with Kennedy remained cordial, but in his later letters, for example on 26 February 1865, while he continues to express appreciation of Kennedy's kindness to him he becomes more critical of him as governor.

Mindful of the fact that his naval appointment was to British Columbia as well as Vancouver Island, Verney made a number of extended visits to the second new governor, Frederick Seymour, in New Westminster; he developed a favourable view of him and evidently enjoyed his stays at Government House there. During his last months on the west coast, politics was increasingly dominated by the question of union between the two colonies. In his earlier letters Verney had emphasized the jealousy existing between the colonies. While he declares in a letter of 26 March 1865, "I eschew politics as much as possible," he makes it clear that he now favours the union of the colonies, preferably under the governorship of Seymour. In contrast to those who were demanding more representative institutions of government in British Columbia, however, when he describes accompanying Kennedy on a visit to Seymour, on 26 February 1865, he advo-

²² Verney's criticism of the House of Assembly on this occasion was widely shared. See Derek Pethick, *Summer of Promise: Victoria 1864-1914* (Victoria: Sono Nis, 1980), 24-25.

cates a "firm despotic government," with a mixture of appointed and elected members in the legislature of the united colonies; and on 4 April he writes that one could not find fifteen men on Vancouver Island who would make good members of parliament or be willing to spare the necessary time from money-making. Such comments, although they come very naturally from an upper-class English naval officer of the period, show that Verney did not always grasp the realities of colonial politics.

Verney's letters to his father on naval matters and the *Grappler* letter-books show that his ship continued in 1864 to be engaged in many of the same activities as in 1862. For example, on 10 May he writes to his father that he expects to go to Comox to investigate reports of smuggling and selling liquor to Indians; and the letter-books show him in October and November investigating reports of liquor traffic with Indians at Kitimat and complaints at Comox against visiting "Yuclatas" for stealing potatoes and against the *Shark* and other small vessels for supplying them with liquor. In the summer of 1864, however, the *Grappler* was involved in less routine activity as a result of the "Chilcotin Uprising," and in the autumn Verney made a second northern voyage, revisiting the Nass and going to the Queen Charlotte Islands.

Since the main scenes of action in the Chilcotin uprising were inland, naval involvement was somewhat peripheral, but in the earlier part of July Verney writes from Bella Coola, where the *Grappler* was stationed to maintain communications with Governor Seymour, and on 1 September he writes from Low Camp, Bute Inlet, en route to Harper's Ferry, where he had been instructed to take ten men to join a group from H.M.S. *Sutlej* in preventing the Chilcotin Indians from fishing, as a means of subduing them and forcing them to give up "marauders" for trial. This letter conveys a strong sense of immediacy: it is written in the evening as he lies "under a rude shelter made of cedar bark, with a fire burning before the opening," beside the muddy Homathko River, under tall cedars and spruce, "among which the bayonet of the sentry gleams from time to time."

Verney's early enjoyment of his command of the *Grappler* had not entirely disappeared in the summer of 1864. On 22 August, when his father reported that the First Lord of the Admiralty, the Duke of Somerset, had spoken of the possibility of a posting to the royal yacht, Verney wrote that he had always considered his present command "the best lieutenant's appointment in the service." The old problems, such as desertion, however, continued to be troublesome. On 5 May he wrote that two men had deserted, taking the ship's dinghy, to American territory, where they could

quadruple their pay. In February the attempted suicide by drowning of the *Grappler's* engineer impressed upon Verney the grimmer side of life aboard his vessel. When the man was rescued, the doctor declared that he was suffering from delerium tremens. Verney comments (18 February):

I can understand that the monotony of being in such a small ship with only one, or, at the most, two messmates, and especially the weariness of these long winter evenings, the ship lying idle and unemployed, have injured his health, and that he has taken opium and spirits to induce sleep and wile a-way the time.

Deterioration in the condition of the *Grappler* had become a serious problem by early 1864, partly as a result of damage sustained on the stormy northern voyage in the autumn of 1863. On 7 February 1864 Verney writes that the ship needs repairs, and on 6 April that she is beached, pending repairs. In a discouraged moment he writes on 4 June:

I am becoming very heartily tired of the "Grappler"; she is very defective: she steams badly: her bottom is all knocked about, and we are so shorthanded that it is one incessant drive to keep the ship in even tolerable order, and it really is impossible to forget all about promotion.

He was faced with special administrative problems as orders had already arrived that the gunboats were to be paid off, and the end of the *Grappler's* current commission was reached on 31 October 1864. The ship was in service again in November but does not seem to have seen much activity after the end of that month. On 22 November Verney reports that the admiral was recommending that the ship be sold, and in April 1865 he states that he is still waiting for the Admiralty's decision about her fate. The end of his three-year appointment to the *Grappler* was reached on 25 February 1865, but he did not make his farewell to the ship until 13 May, when he hauled down her pennant for the last time, three weeks before he began his return journey to England.²³

As he indicates in his letter of 4 June 1864, during the later part of his period on the west coast Verney was becoming increasingly impatient at his lack of promotion.²⁴ On 8 February 1864 he complains that he has

²³ After Verney's departure the *Grappler* was placed on the sale list at Esquimalt; from its sale in 1868 it was used in the commercial coastal trade until its destruction by fire with heavy loss of life in Seymour Narrows in 1883. See Admiral P. W. Brock, "Ships Dossiers," Provincial Archives of B.C., Add. MS 265.

²⁴ Verney's letters include comments on his superior officers. He took a favourable view of admirals Maitland and Kingcome. He writes appreciatively of Admiral Denman's kindness to him but becomes increasingly critical of him (e.g., 7 and 8 December 1864). He has highest praise for Captain Lord Gilford and his ship, H.M.S. *Tribune* (17 April and 2 May 1864).

been fourteen years in the navy and is still a lieutenant. His impatience was intensified by the fact that on his mother's side he came from a distinguished naval family. Her father, Rear Admiral Sir George Hope, had been one of Nelson's captains at Trafalgar, and her brother, whom Verney appropriately refers to in his letters as "Uncle Hope," was Rear Admiral (later Admiral of the Fleet) Sir James Hope, who in 1863 became naval commander-in-chief for British North America and the West Indies (though not for the Pacific Station where Verney served).²⁵

Verney's hope for more rapid promotion had been based partly on his earlier service in the Crimean War and the Indian Mutiny. An interesting reminder of the time in the Crimea was provided in May 1864 by the arrival at Esquimalt of a Russian corvette, commanded by Admiral Popoff, who had been rapidly promoted, as Verney enviously notes, for his services at Sevastopol, during the period when Verney, aboard H.M.S. *Terrible*, had been engaged in repeated bombardments of that city. The meeting was cordial, and Verney reports (20 May):

He was much interested in seeing the pocket sextant that Miss Nightingale gave me, and enquired much about her; he was quite indignant when I shewed it to him, and asked him if he knew the name; he said that of course everybody had heard of Florence Nightingale.

On 6 March 1864, while the *Grappler* was awaiting repairs to her bottom, Verney complained: "all this time I am enduring that state which is to me the most wearisome, the state of idleness and inactivity." In fact, however, he continued to involve himself energetically in a wide range of activities beyond his strictly naval duties. On 25 May of this year he writes: "I have a good deal of work in hand just now, besides the 'Grappler': I am a member of the 'Exploration Committee' and Chairman of the sub-committee appointed to draw up regulations for and to conclude arrangements with the Exploring Party." On 28 June he reports bringing members of the Vancouver Island Exploring Expedition, headed by Robert Brown, aboard the *Grappler* to Cowichan.²⁶ On 27 October he states that he has been busy since his return from the northern cruise: in addition to paying off and settling the accounts of the *Grappler*, there are lighthouse accounts for five months, and the Exploration Committee to be wound up.

²⁵ See the articles on Sir George and Sir James Hope in *The Dictionary of National Biography*.

²⁶ Robert Brown's Journal contains acknowledgement of Verney's zealotness in offering assistance to the expedition: 27 August 1864, in John Hayman's edition, *Robert Brown*, 117.

On 23 April 1865 he sent his father copies of Brown's printed report on the exploration expedition.

Good causes for which Verney worked during his last months on the west coast range from the individual case of Edmund Coleman the artist to the founding of the Victoria Mechanics' Institute. On 8 February 1865 he states he has known Coleman for two years and likes him. The artist is "in some distress here," never having been brought up to hard work, and Verney attempts to interest his father in him, recommending Coleman's book on Mount Blanc.²⁷ On 29 November 1864 he reports that he has been elected, by working men, one of the committee to found a Mechanics' Institute and asks his father to send books for it, including duplicates from the library at Claydon House. On 11 April 1865 we find him preparing his parting address to the Mechanics' Institute: he had clearly become specially dedicated to its welfare.

Other activities Verney continued to enjoy and write about at every opportunity include hunting (or "shooting"), fishing, picking berries, and gathering seeds of plants and trees to send back to Claydon. He took a great interest also in gardening and raising fowls: ducks, turkeys, and pigeons, at his cottage in Esquimalt, originally named "The Palace," later "The Small Bower." Characteristically, on 25 May 1864, when he was discouraged by such problems as the bad state of repair of the *Grappler*, he consoled himself with the thought: "the green peas in my garden will be ripe next week."

The coastal scenery and changing seasons continued to be a constant source of pleasure to Verney. On 21 April 1864 he describes a visit on horseback with Governor Kennedy to the new gold mines at Goldstream:

I had never been so far along that road before, and was much delighted with the beautiful views we opened out from time to time: the day was very fine, so the nearer hills of the Island and the more distant mountains of the Olympian Range were equally clear, and an occasional glimpse of the water in the Straits of Fuca made it a scene of great beauty: most of the trees and bushes are in leaf, while the least advanced are budding; a few days hence the under-wood will be so thick that some of the best points of view will be blocked up.

In the summer of this year he provides descriptions of the more rugged coastal scenery he became familiar with at the time of the Chilcotin uprising. On 13 July he describes Bella Coola with its "picturesque waterfalls,"

²⁷ On Coleman see John Hayman, "Where Flowers Forever Bloom: A Victorian Artist at the Edge of the Pacific," *The Beaver* 66.2 (April-May 1986): 27-35. It may be more than coincidence that two of Verney's favoured causes became connected when Coleman was offered temporary relief by being named librarian of the Mechanics' Institute in May 1865.

where he enjoyed picking berries, and on 1 September the area at the head of Bute Inlet: "The country here is wild and rugged in the extreme, more so than any parts of B.C. that I have seen."

While in earlier letters he wrote much of the glorious spring and summer of 1862, in January 1864 he writes that the Fraser is frozen over, cutting off most communication with British Columbia. He found enjoyment in severe seasons as well as mild ones, and on 28 January 1865, when there was a snowfall at Esquimalt, he writes about going sleighing for the first time in his life. His recording of the seasons includes such reports as this, on 4 March 1864, when the signs of spring had evidently been late in appearing: "Be it remembered that the first wild-flower, a little forget-me-not, appeared on the twenty-sixth of last month."

One subject about which one might wish Verney had written more fully than he does is his view of the native Indians. His earlier letters and other writings at the time of the Indian Mutiny would lead one to expect a sympathetic attitude toward native races. Even during the period of fierce English reaction to atrocities, he held that the Mutiny had been caused by the contempt displayed by the English for the native races of India, and that reports of atrocities had been much exaggerated.²⁸ In his Vancouver Island letters a similarly enlightened attitude appears, for example, when he deploras on 1 March 1864 the racial prejudice through which the coloured volunteer rifle brigade in Victoria had been excluded by the committee of management from the procession to welcome Governor Kennedy: he expresses the hope that "by a little wholesome agitation on their part they will obtain some recognition" and declares: "I have been surprised and disappointed at the narrow-mindedness that has lately showed itself in connection with the change of Governors."

As has already been noted, however, his earliest impression of the native Indians on the west coast was unfavourable. In his first letter from Esquimalt he wrote, on 15 May 1862:

[The] pictures in Vancouver's book are very good;²⁹ the natives are hideously ugly and atrociously dirty: their customs are beastly, manners they have none: there has been a compulsory exodus of them which is still going on, on account of the small-pox which is raging fearfully among them; as soon as they clear

²⁸ See Edmund Verney's *The Shannon's Brigade in India*, 41-42, 88, and G. L. Verney's *The Devil's Wind*, 120.

²⁹ Verney presumably refers to the engraved illustrations in George Vancouver's *A Voyage of Discovery to the North Pacific Ocean, and Round the World* (London, 1798; second edition, 1801), although the figures of Indians are much smaller in scale and less distinctive than those that had appeared in James Cook's *A Voyage to the Pacific Ocean* (1784).

out their houses are burnt down: the bishop and one or two of his clergy have been working most assiduously among the wretched dead and dying of this loathsome disease, which shows itself among these poor wretches in its most malignant form.

Verney's first contact with the Indians was in an area in the vicinity of gold-rush Victoria and the Esquimalt base that was a notorious centre of vice and degradation, and it was during that most terrible moment in coastal Indian history, the great smallpox epidemic. Since we do not have his letters for 1863, we do not know what his first impressions were of the northern tribes when he saw them on their home grounds. It appears, however, that by the end of his time in British Columbia he viewed the Indians as picturesque rather than as ugly. On 21 May 1865, as he prepared to make his final visit to New Westminster, he wrote that he was looking forward to the great assembly of Indians gathered there for the Queen's birthday, which should be a fine sight.

As one might expect, Verney took an interest in missionary work among Indians, which he viewed from a distinctly Protestant perspective. On 16 August 1862 he writes that he has accompanied the Anglican missionary, Rev. A. C. Garrett, by canoe to Cowichan, and on 7 September, after he had returned there in the *Grappler*, he describes with approval a sermon preached to the Indians by Mr. Garrett: "it was a very interesting sight to see some thirty or forty gathered round him, with their dark eyes fixed intently on his face, as he explained to them in simple childish sentences a highly coloured picture of Adam and Eve being driven out of the garden of Eden"; and he contrasts this simple preaching of Scriptural truths with the work of the Roman Catholic priest who has taught the Cowichans to "chaunt a horrible jargon of French, Chinook, and Latin about the Virgin Mary &c, not one word of which do they understand: it is at first very pleasing to hear their chaunt wafted over the calm evening air, but one cannot derive pleasure from the sound when one reflects on the mockery of religion which produces it." He writes very favourably of the work of William Duncan at Metlakatla, and reports in October 1864 great progress since his previous visit a year earlier.

Whether Verney perceived any parallel between the expulsion from Eden and the dispossession of the Cowichan Indians from their lands is not clear, but on 10 May 1863 he wrote to Commodore Spencer after a visit to the Cowichan settlement: "The only cause of complaint, and it appears to be a just one, is that the Governor has not yet paid the Indians for the land according to his promise," and he warned that the failure to

settle land claims would lead to trouble. This letter evidently proved controversial, and in order to justify himself Verney subsequently enclosed a copy in one of his 1864 letters to his father.

Although in the existing letters Verney does not write so fully about the Indians as about some other subjects, his wide-ranging interests certainly extended to a number of aspects of coastal Indian culture, as is illustrated by this detailed description of Indian fishing methods at Bella Coola, on 9 July 1864, which is not apparently linked with the mission he was later given at Bute Inlet but is provided as a matter of interest in its own right:

I have been much interested in observing the salmon fishing; at this season of the year they come in from the sea and force their way up the rivers to deposit their spawn, and show a wonderful determination in darting up rapids: across the Bella Coula river a dam has been built of logs, boughs, trunks of trees &c, in which three or four clear places have been left: the water on the upper side of the dam is perhaps three or four feet higher than on the other, and finds its way between the logs or over them more or less along its whole length: but where the gaps have been left it rushes through with great speed, and it is for these gaps that the salmon make: these gaps are filled by a large rectangular wicker work basket or trough about six feet by twelve made with very large meshes only just close enough to keep the fish from escaping, so as to offer as little resistance to the water as possible: the lower side of this basket is not a right angle, but inclines inwards at an angle of about 45° ; neither is it as high as the other three sides, which are perhaps five or six feet: the water rushes down through this basket, submerging the inclined side: the salmon springs up the little waterfall, over the inclined side, and into the basket: hence it could easily leap back again if it knew its danger, but its instinct teaches it only to ascend the stream so it swims to the upper end of the basket and there pokes about seeking for egress: in the meantime it touches as it swims about three strings attached to the bottom of the basket and held at the other end by a boy who is on the look-out; he feels the contact, and at once the basket is raised out of the water, and the fish taken from it.

In this way the natives catch in one basket from a dozen to a dozen and a half salmon in an hour, often getting two at one haul: they are at once handed over to the women who clean them, cut them open and spread-eagle them on sticks, and dry them in the smoke of their fires: after this process they will keep for a long time, and if cooked after our fashion make a dish by no means to be despised.

During his period in British Columbia Verney built up a notable collection of Indian artefacts, which he shipped back in several instalments to Claydon House. On 7 February 1864 he wrote to his father that he was preparing a box of curiosities to send home by the Hudson's Bay Company steamer *Princess Royal*, and he subsequently enclosed a long list of articles

sent by this ship in March 1864. On 11 December 1864 he wrote that H.M.S. *Charybdis*, which took home ten men from the *Grappler*, also carried Indian mats and other objects for him, in custody of the chaplain. On 15 March 1865 he states that he believes that with what he has already sent in the *Princess Royal* and a few articles he still has, this is one of the best collections of curiosities of the country that has ever been sent to England, and that, as these things every day grow more rare, probably such a good collection could not again be formed, except at great expense.³⁰

The articles listed as sent in the *Princess Royal* in March 1864 include objects described as: "Mask of sea-monster with plenty of jaw," "Hairy human mask," "Hairy little devils," "Inquisitive bird with painful [*sic*] tail," "Small astonished head-dresses with mother-of-pearl eyes," "Mysterious squeaker," "Facetious devil on a pivot," "Supercilious coxcomb," large carved head-dress "with birds and beak complete," and "Head-dress of bear's claws." There are birchbark mats from Metlakatla, a large carved chest, several carved wooden bowls, an ancient stone bowl, stone adzes, an "ivory" soul-catcher, carved spoon, drum, baskets, moccasins, charms, and other objects.³¹ After its arrival in England this collection was displayed for many years as part of a private museum at Claydon House. It is now dispersed, but photographs, which can still be seen at Claydon, and other records confirm Verney's claim that it was an outstanding collection. It was rich in Haida artefacts, among others, and along with many smaller objects included two large Salish house-posts from Comox.

Verney's presence and activities in British Columbia brought people as well as artefacts to Claydon House. His letters show that during his period there Claydon House received a number of visits from those connected with the two western colonies. Arthur Kennedy was not the first such person to enjoy Sir Harry Verney's hospitality, for the letters indicate that in August 1862 A. H. P. Helby, the former commander of the *Grappler*, stayed at Claydon. Between December 1864 and February 1865 Sir Harry Verney had several meetings with Bishop Hills, and when the bishop gratified Edmund's long-held desire that he should marry, the new couple stayed at Claydon. In April 1865 Sir Harry met, whether at Claydon or in London, "Dr. Ash," presumably the Dr. John Ash of Victoria who was active in colonial politics. Edmund Verney had good reason to write to his father

³⁰ Verney is thus to be added to the collectors whose activities are described by Douglas Cole in his *Captured Heritage: The Scramble for Northwest Coast Artifacts* (Vancouver and Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre, 1985).

³¹ It is possible that the date 1864 on this list is a slip for 1865, as the list is now to be found with letters of March of the latter year.

on 4 June 1864: "I am very glad you have met so many people from these parts, as you will have learnt so much about these Colonies."³²

Among the souvenirs Verney promised his father he would bring back to England with him was the pennant of the *Grappler*, when he wrote of hauling it down for the last time at sunset on 13 May 1865. During his last weeks on Vancouver Island he confessed to a feeling of sadness as he compared his sense of his own failures and shortcomings with his original high hopes. But with his final letters from the colony he was able to include a clipping from *The British Colonist*, 3 June, which contained a lengthy account of a farewell dinner given for him in Victoria the evening before. The forty persons present included Chief Justice Cameron, who acted as chairman, the Colonial Secretary, Attorney General, Treasurer, and many other officials and well-known residents. G. M. Sproat, who acted as vice-chairman, presented an address to Verney, not only with tributes to his work as naval officer and magistrate, his contribution "to the security and comfort of the outlying settlers in different parts of the Island, and to the preservation of peace and friendliness between them and the native tribes," but with praise specially of his activities as a citizen of Victoria. The address stated: "In almost every important effort for the public good which has been made in Victoria during the last three years you have taken an active and useful part," and it provided a list of these good works. That Sproat's tribute was a genuine one is confirmed by his dedication three years later of his book, *Scenes and Studies of Savage Life* (1868), to "Edmund Hope Verney R.N., whose name associated with good works, will long be remembered in Vancouver Island."

On 3 June Verney left Victoria for San Francisco, having decided to travel overland from that city, carrying only a saddle bag, while his servant Henry took his luggage by way of Panama. In long letters to his father he provides an extremely interesting account of his trip by stagecoach and horseback through a still very wild American west. He reached the railroad in Illinois by August, and arrived at Liverpool on 10 September.

Two of the ambitions Verney had expressed in the Vancouver Island letters were fulfilled soon after his return to England: the desire for promotion and the desire to marry. In 1866 he was promoted to commander. Although he lost a leg as a result of a shooting accident at Claydon in 1869, he was in command of H.M.S. *Growler* in the Mediterranean in 1872. He retired from the navy soon afterwards but was promoted captain on the

³² On 2 May 1864, when Sir James Douglas was about to visit England, Verney wrote to his father, "pray let me know if you see him," but I have not found evidence that a meeting took place in this case.

retired list in 1877. In 1868 he married Margaret Williams, member of a prominent Welsh family, who is now best remembered for her publication of volumes based on the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Verney family papers, continuing a work begun by Parthenope, Lady Verney.³³

Much of Edmund Verney's later life was devoted to management of family estates and local administration in Buckinghamshire and North Wales, but he involved himself also in social and political causes at the national level. Among the causes he supported were Home Rule for Ireland and the abolition of capital punishment, and his publications included a pamphlet opposing annexation of the Transvaal, in which it is interesting to find the former commander of the *Grappler* as the critic of British imperial expansion.³⁴ He sat as Liberal Member of Parliament for Buckingham in 1885-86 and 1889-91, but in 1891 his career in public life was cut short by a sexual scandal, ironic as this appears in the light of passages in the Vancouver Island letters.³⁵ In 1894 he became Sir Edmund, on inheriting the family baronetcy, together with Claydon, on the death of his father. When he himself died in 1910 the Rector of Middle Claydon, Rev. Arthur Gordon, commended him for qualities that are very evident in the Vancouver Island letters: great energy and attention to detail, and a concern for betterment at all levels, from household management to local and national affairs.³⁶

In later times the three years Edmund Verney spent in British Columbia seem to have been less remembered within his family than the youthful courage and ability he had displayed during the Crimean War and the Indian Mutiny, and his command of the little *Grappler* was overshadowed by his later command of the much greater *Growler*. When his great-nephew wrote a sketch of his life in 1956, the period in British Columbia was not mentioned at all.³⁷ Yet that period left a number of marks, as well

³³ See the biographical accounts in G. L. Verney's *The Devil's Wind*, and in *Debrett's Baronetage, Knightage and Companionship* (London: Dean & Son, 1900), 592. Debrett gives a later date, 1884, than G. L. Verney for Edmund Verney's retirement from the navy.

³⁴ See Verney's *Four Years of Protest in the Transvaal. A Poem from the South African Blue Books* (London: William Ridgeway, 1881), actually a prose pamphlet.

³⁵ Reports of Verney's being charged with and convicted of attempting to procure a young woman for immoral purposes were carried in Victoria by *The Daily Colonist*, 14 and 17 April, 2 and 7 May 1891 under the headings: "A London Scandal," "The Verney Scandal," and "Captain Verney in Court."

³⁶ A copy of Gordon's privately printed *In Memoriam Edmund Hope Verney* (1910) is held by the British Library.

³⁷ G. L. Verney's biography in *The Devil's Wind*.

as those achievements mentioned at the farewell banquet in Victoria in 1865.

Among the consequences of Verney's time in British Columbia is the presence of more than a dozen place names associated with him and his family on coastal maps and charts. He mentions in a letter of 8 December 1862 meeting his old friend and former shipmate, Daniel Pender, who was about to begin coastal surveys in the historic old Hudson's Bay Company ship, the *Beaver*. As a result of this friendship Pender placed on his charts Verney Passage in Douglas Channel, Verney Cone (or Mount Verney) on Gunboat Passage, Cunningham Island, and a large concentration of associated names on and near Grappler Sound in the Wells Passage area of Queen Charlotte Sound: Verney Mountain, Sir Harry Range, Calvert Mountain, Eliza Mountain (named for Edmund's mother), Emily Mountain (for Edmund's favourite sister), Claydon Bay, Fermanaugh Mountain (from a peerage once held by the Verney family), Parthenope and Nightingale mountains, and Embley Lagoon (from the Nightingale family estate). Most of these names were identified by the very well informed Captain John Walbran in his *British Columbia Coast Names* (1909) as connected with the Verney family. Some other names similarly linked can now be identified from Edmund Verney's letters, including Dunsaney Passage, Hopetown Passage and Linlithgow Point, all in the vicinity of Grappler Sound. In his Vancouver Island letters Verney refers to his relatives "Aunt Dunsaney" and Lord Dunsaney, and appears to refer to his mother's family, the Hopes, as a branch of the aristocratic Scottish family, which was headed by the Earl of Hopetoun, whose seat was Hopetoun House in Linlithgowshire.

In a letter from Esquimalt on 27 October 1864, Verney asked his father whether the seeds of *Wellingtonia Gigantea* (or sequoia) which he had sent back to Claydon had thriven. A century and a quarter later it can be answered that they have thriven greatly and grown to a mighty size, although the seeds actually originating in British Columbia have not left such evident marks on the landscape at Claydon. While the Indian artefacts Verney acquired in British Columbia are no longer to be found at Claydon, some of them are now held in London by the Museum of Mankind, the ethnography department of the British Museum. It is one of the results of Verney's collecting activities that visitors to the Museum of Mankind find two Salish house-posts from Comox displayed in the room that serves as the general introduction to the museum.³⁸

³⁸ Verney's collection of British Columbia Indian artefacts seems to have remained intact at Claydon House until 1931, when part of it was acquired by Harry G.

It is the letters, however, that now best commemorate Edmund Verney's time in British Columbia. Edmund cautioned his father to be careful about circulating these letters, although he mentions at least one occasion on which Sir Harry quoted from them, as from an anonymous source, in the House of Commons and in a letter to the *Times*.³⁹ Today the letters bring to life a figure who, while they remained unknown, had become in British Columbia little more than a name occasionally encountered in colonial naval and social records, and they provide a distinctive addition to the contemporary accounts of colonial life. They give a view of the two western colonies that is marked by strong opinions, great enthusiasms, and vigorous criticisms, sometimes prejudiced, but always lively, never bland or dull.

Beasley. This passed with Beasley's large ethnographical collection to the British Museum in 1944. Information about Verney's collection is to be found under the year 1931 in volume III of Beasley's manuscript Catalogue, now held by the Museum of Mankind, as well as in the museum's other records. I am indebted to the staff of the Museum of Mankind for allowing me to examine these records.

³⁹ Letters of 27 June, 7 August, and 22 September 1862.